

**AFGHANISTAN  
AND  
BRITISH INDIA**



**Asghar H. Bilgrami**

**A F G H A N I S T A N  
A N D  
B R I T I S H I N D I A  
1793-1907**



**A Study In Foreign Relations**



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# AFGHANISTAN AND BRITISH INDIA

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## PREFACE

The study owes its origin to a thesis supplicated for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, in 1954. The present volume, however, is not a revised version of the thesis; it is an entirely new book, different in method of approach and presentation from the former. Material used earlier has been supplemented by further research and rethinking to arrive at somewhat different conclusions than before.

This study is not primarily intended to be a diplomatic history in depth. My object is to present a single continuous argument of Afghanistan's political relations with British India in a more or less cohesive sequence. It is done in pursuance of the understanding that the period, beginning from 1793 upto its logical culmination in 1907, forms one distinct process, needing a special treatment altogether. This, I feel, has not hitherto been done, at least, in the manner I have tried to attempt in these pages.

The nature of the subject, therefore, has inevitably led to the adoption of a chronological method of presentation to pick up the various threads of the matter, including those having wider implications of an international character, and weave them into a single pattern.

I have tried to base the study, largely, on the records of the National Archives of India, New Delhi, Persian manuscripts and other relevant material available at the Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh and supplemented it by some research at the India Office Library and the British Museum. Printed records are also utilized. Published and unpublished accounts of those who were personally involved in the affairs, either officially or

indirectly, have been carefully noted. I am particularly indebted to the scholars whose researches greatly facilitated my task. References, appendices and the bibliography are indicative of the extent to which I have utilized these sources.

I must record my gratitude to Professor Chaudheri Mohammad Sultan, formerly Head of the Department of Political Science at the Aligarh Muslim University, who supervised the work initially as a doctoral thesis, and took personal interest in its revision; and to Dr S. Nurul Hasan, now Union Minister for Education, for his expert advice during the initial preparation of this study, and his constant encouragement. I am indebted to the Late Professor Mohammad Habib for the benefits I have derived from his immense store of knowledge that helped me in understanding the vagaries of the problems involved in this study. I am much obliged to my friend and colleague, Dr S. Nabi Hadi, for his invaluable help and advice.

I am everlastingly indebted to my uncle, Saiyid Ali Akhtar Rizvi, who has been an invariable source of inspiration and intellectual stimulation.

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It is, however, my wife Suraiya, without whose abiding interest in my work, and constant help and assistance, the completion of this study would have been impossible. Unflinching cooperation of my friend, Mustafa Wizarat greatly facilitated my task. My cousins Athar Abbas and Rizwana helped me in many ways. I must not forget the help so readily made available to me by my good and faithful friends particularly, Umesh Narain Mathur.

I acknowledge with thanks the help rendered to me by the staff of the libraries where I carried on my researches; particularly the National Archives of India, for the courtesy to use its records, and produce some of them in appendices. I am also obliged to Mr A. Qayyum for patiently typing the manuscript. I am also grateful to Mr Baqar Raza Mehdi of Maulana Azad Library, AMU, Aligarh, for helping me in the preparation of the index.

In spite of the generous help of so many friends, there may still be deficiencies of argument and infelicities of style for which, needless to say, I alone am responsible. It may also be added that no one beside the author holds any responsibility either for the presentation of facts or the expression of views in this study.

ASGHAR H. BILGRAMI

To  
The Memory of my Grandfather  
Mir Amjad Ali

## INTRODUCTION

The relations between British India and Afghanistan are analysed in this study as a phase of the diplomatic history of India inextricably linked with the British imperialist policy, which in turn, was largely conditioned by the world wide imperialist impulse.

Broadly speaking, the same political and economic impulse which carried the English standard, in the course of a century, from the Bay of Bengal to Peshawar, brought the Russians, over the subverted thrones of Central Asian rulers, to the borders of Afghanistan, where the two mighty empires found themselves facing each other one seeking a 'safe and scientific' frontier, the other in search of 'warm waters'. Their mutual rivalry ensured the survival of Afghanistan as an independent entity.

The Afghans themselves played an invaluable part in this unique drama of high politics. That they did not remain mere passive spectators, like the rulers and peoples of India and Persia, and those of the khanates of Central Asia, was partly due to the strategic location of their country, and partly because of their own character and the skilfulness and dexterity of their rulers. Despite the interregnum of anarchy in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the feeling of national self-identification, generated since the first organisation of Afghanistan as a politically independent entity under Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1747, remained the guiding force of Afghan statecraft. Under Dost Mohammad Khan, it took the form of a struggle for bringing all the Afghan people within one territorial state, and subsequently, in gaining for the state, freedom from foreign control.



This study is an attempt to treat the subject in its entirety, beginning from the last decade of the eighteenth century and ending up in the first decade of the twentieth with the Anglo-Russian rapprochement of 1907. It maintains the unity of the subject from the evolution of the Anglo-Russian rivalry to the century long crystallization of the various situations of conflict leading finally to an unprecedented state of colonial and imperial reconciliation between Great Britain and Russia. It brings forth the fact of consolidation and existence of Afghanistan as an independent political entity, despite the pulls and pressures of the two powerful nations. It also witnesses how the Afghans empirically learnt, through a process of trial and error, to survive the machinations of the coveting imperialists, at times by playing one power against the other.

British policy towards Afghanistan was largely shaped by the considerations of Indian defence. Its various facets are, therefore, analysed to the extent they served to promote the security of India. Notable among the facets examined are : 'Forward Policy', policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan known as 'Masterly Inactivity', attempts to constitute a 'neutral zone' or 'buffer state' between the British and Russian possessions, and the continued British attempts to control the foreign and defence policies of Afghanistan. Also taken into account are the Anglo-Russian diplomacy in Persia, the European power politics and the 'Eastern Question', and their bearing on the Afghan issue.

Afghanistan, owing to its strategic position has played a pivotal role in India's destiny, as it provided the historical invasion routes to the sub-continent. Its importance in British thinking and policy began in the wake of Zaman Shah's invasions (1793-1800), when the French under Napoleon Bonaparte, closely followed by the Russians, evinced interest in the invasion and conquest of India via Persia and Afghanistan. The British expansion toward the north-west and their military intervention in Afghanistan (1838-42), were attempts to guard their empire by controlling the strategic routes against possible invaders.

The reason why the British were so sensitive about the defence of the North-West Frontier is not far to seek. Their power was essentially sea-oriented. They came to India by sea route, and their expansion was from the east and south of India towards the north-west in search of some natural stronghold from where they could defend their Indian Empire against the land-based Russian power. Maintenance of the link with base in England was also basic to Indian defence, which required the protection of the British 'imperial life-line' through the Mediterranean and preventing the Russian power from entering either the Mediterranean or gaining a foothold in the Persian Gulf.

The Anglo-Russian rivalry in Persia was an essential corollary to the Afghan question. Before the Russians manifested themselves on the frontiers of Afghanistan, that is, till about the middle of the nineteenth century, their power and influence was mostly felt on Persia. They encouraged Persia to get compensation at the cost of Afghanistan : a Russian success against Persia was followed by a Persian thrust against the Afghans. This was a recurrent pattern. The Russian power, it seems, was mainly directed towards the Persian Gulf while the pressure on Afghanistan was to keep the British occupied and concede Russia a warm water outlet. For the British, however, it was much easier to have a naval demonstration in the Persian Gulf, both to relieve Afghanistan from Persian pressure and prevent Russia from gaining such an outlet. The demonstrations took place in 1838, 1857 and 1903. The policy of the British apparently seems paradoxical. In 1800, by the Malcolm treaties, they asked Persia to put pressure on Herat so as to relieve them from Afghan invasion. In 1838 and 1857, they thwarted such Persian moves, while after the Second Afghan War, they were inclined to give Herat to Persia. And when Britain was involved in the Boer's war, Russian warships attempted to establish a naval base at Bandar Abbas. The British Government moved to resist the Russian naval presence. In November 1903, Lord Curzon visited the Gulf with a formidable array of warships to assert British supremacy.

But this fluctuating British policy was indeed guided by a consistent purpose of achieving security for India.

In the latter half of the century, the 'Eastern Question' had an important bearing on the Afghan issue. Britain's support for the Ottomans had led Russia to put pressure on Afghanistan to gain concessions from the British in Europe. The changes in European power balance and the increase of German influence over the government at Constantinople, tended to close the Anglo-Russian rivalry in Europe. The stability of political conditions in Afghanistan after 1880, and the resistance by Abdurrahman and Habibullah Khan, to play the role of a mere pawn in the game of power politics, paved the way for the Anglo-Russian rapprochement.

One serious shortcoming of the British policy has been that it was mainly directed to provide against the possibility of Russian aggression, and, in so doing, it failed to take full cognizance of the internal compulsions on the Afghan rulers, and their susceptibilities. This was mostly the case when the 'Forward Policy' was in motion. Afghanistan was treated merely as a pawn to subserve the interests of India's security. When the full significance of Afghanistan was recognized, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the British, in cooperation with the Russians, contrived to get its boundaries demarcated. This, in turn, contributed to the maintenance of internal stability in Afghanistan and provided security to India in a larger measure than before.

The main object of British policy was to keep the Afghan state out of the orbit of Tsarist Russia and within that of India. The two wars which the British fought with Afghanistan did contribute in promoting, if not achieving, that objective. The British impressed upon the Russians their readiness to use arms to keep Afghanistan within their influence as an essential part of India's security. The wars also made it clear to the Afghans that they could not be allowed to endanger India by getting away from the British tutelage to that of Russia. The extent of success the British achieved in their objective can be gauged from the



stipulations of the Anglo-Russian convention whereby Afghanistan was excluded from the Russian sphere of influence.

The convention, however, was a milestone in the Afghan struggle for independence from foreign control. Amir Shere Ali's was the first attempt in that direction in the 1870s. It proved abortive, largely, because the Amir failed to anticipate the extent to which the British were prepared to allow the Afghan ruler to go. The inability of the British to hold Afghanistan, as evidenced during the war (1878-1880), helped Abdurrahman to usher in an era of peaceful but steady resistance to British interference in Afghan affairs. It was Habibullah Khan, who, by refusing to have anything to do with the convention on the ground that he was not consulted in its deliberations, laid the foundation of Afghanistan's sovereignty and independence in foreign relations.

The study of British relations with Afghanistan (1793-1907) is of considerable significance as it deals with the formative period of India's foreign and defence policies. It shows how the British sought to safeguard the sub-continent by providing it with a geographically viable frontier, controlling the mountain passes that link it with the Asian hinterland, and surrounding it by a chain of buffer states. A sub-continent unified under the effective control of the British Government was an essential pre-requisite of such a policy. The west-ward expansion of the British Empire towards Afghanistan may be ascribed to the urge to reach the limits of a defensible frontier. Today the British experience has a particular relevance for India and the other nations of the subcontinent.



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# 1

## In Historical Perspective

**A**FGHANISTAN emerged as an independent political entity, for the first time in history, in 1747, when Ahmad Shah Abdali united its various principalities into an organized state. Till then, these regions of Afghanistan either formed parts of the Indian and Persian empires or had remained small isolated tribal units.

The relations of Afghanistan with India are, however, as old as history itself. The valleys and mountain passes of Afghanistan acted as channels for currents and cross-currents of history that had continually flowed from Central Asia into India, changing the colour and character of the Indian people and moulding the course of their destiny. This process continued till the establishment of British hegemony in India. And it was under the British that Afghanistan came to occupy a commanding position in the political and military considerations of their Indian Empire.

After the death of Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1773 the boundaries of Afghanistan continued to fluctuate as a result of instable internal political conditions brought about by the internecine feuds for succession to the Afghan throne. It was not till the end of the nineteenth century that, on the

initiative of the British and in cooperation with the Russians, the frontiers of Afghanistan were defined and demarcated by several boundary commissions. The present limits of Afghanistan rest on those demarcations.

Geographically, Afghanistan is bounded in the north and east by immense mountain ranges and on the south-west by vast tracts of sandy desert. Together these physical features constitute formidable natural defences for the country which has a common frontier with Russia in the north, with Pakistan—which was part of British India upto 1947—in the north-east and the south, and with Iran in the west and the south-west. The population of Afghanistan is composed of people of diverse origins. It is natural because it is a country through which throughout the ages vast hordes of invaders made their way into India. Thus, its northern part is inhabited by the Uzbeks, the south-eastern part by the Ghilzais, and Seistan and Herat by people of Iranian stock (Tajiks) who are mostly Persian-speaking. Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad and Ghazni are inhabited by Afghans themselves who account for more than half of the population of the country and enjoy the highest power and prestige. The language of Afghanistan has been Persian since the Ghaznavids; but Pushtu, the language of the Afghans, is gradually emerging as closest to being a national language. The royal house belongs to the Durrani tribe and enjoys the support of the other peoples of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is accessible to foreigners through a limited number of passes. Most of them on the Russian, Persian and Indian (now Pakistani) side remain intractable in winter. Of these, the Zulfiqar pass on the Russian side was regarded by the British Indian Government as the most vulnerable point because of the threat posed by the Russian expansionism in the nineteenth century. Beside, the high plateau and mountain ranges of the Hindu Kush provided a formidable line of defence for the British Empire in India. There were, however, dangerous chinks in this defensive armour—the Chitral, the Kurram and the Gomal valleys, and the Khyber and Khojak-Bolan passes. Since

time immemorial these valleys and passes were the invasion routes into northern India. Because of the Russian threat the problem of the north-west frontier proved to be, by far, the heaviest of all the frontier commitments the British empire-builders had to shoulder. The British control of the tribal territory, lying between the Indus and the upland plateau of Afghanistan and containing the historic passes, constituted the key to the defence strategy of India. The tribal territory is inhabited by the kinsmen of the pure Afghans whose demand, since 1947, for an independent Pakhtoonistan is unequivocally supported by the government at Kabul. The British left this frontier problem as a perennial legacy to Pakistan in 1947.

Historically, Afghanistan has been the scene of many civilizations. Its territories, traversed by famous men and hordes of invincible conquerors, formed parts of the great empires of the Persians, the Greeks, the Maurayas and the Kushans. The Aryans were the earliest people to enter India by this route. The Achaemenian Empire under Darius, the Great (500 B.C.) extended from Central Asia to the banks of the Indus. Alexander of Macedonia was the first among the conquerors to cross the Hindu Kush; while Seleucus, who ruled over the eastern portion of the Greek Empire, could not cross the Indus due to the powerful Mauryas who were soon to obtain sway over the country of the Hindu Kush. Later, Emperor Asoka established a centre for the spread of Buddhism at Gandhara. The Scythians or the Sakas, harassed by the other Central Asian tribes, conquered Bactria and reached the Indus sometime after 127 B.C., and thereafter established empires in the north-western India. Before the close of the first century A.D. the Kushans, under Kadphises I, crossed the Hindu Kush and assumed control of the valley of the Kabul river and of Gandhara where they encountered and defeated the Sakas. Later on, the Kushan king Kanishka exercised his authority over a large empire stretching from Kabul to Banaras. At the beginning of the third century A.D. the powerful Sasanian monarch Ardashir carried his conquest to the borders of Bactria and invaded India as far as

Sirhind in the Punjab. Thereafter, the Huns, inhabitants of the steppes of Central Asia, poured into India about 450 A.D., shook the powerful Gupta Empire to its foundations and eventually consigned it to oblivion.

By the middle of the seventh century A.D. the Arab conquerors overthrew the rulers of Persia and reached the gates of Kabul and Kandahar. Early in the following century, Mohammad Bin Qasim entered India and occupied Makran and Multan. The eleventh century, however, is of vital importance in the history of Indo-Afghan relations as Mahmud ascended the throne of Ghazni in 998 A.D. He carried out a series of raiding forays into India and took away with him a huge amount of wealth to replenish his imperial coffers. His expeditions made a devastating impact on the political conditions of India. Mohammad Ghorî continued to emulate his predecessor. The defeat of the Indian princes by Ghorî exercised far-reaching influences on political and economic conditions of India. But the significant act of Ghorî was Qutubuddin's appointment as governor of the Punjab. Qutubuddin conquered Delhi and laid the foundation of Turkish rule in India. The notable expedition of the wellknown Central Asian Emperor Timur took place in 1398 when he invaded India and sacked Delhi which contributed to the downfall of the Tughluq Empire.

The next historical event the consequences of which were indeed far-reaching was the invasion of Zahiruddin Mohammad Babur. After being displaced from Ferghana in Central Asia, Babur occupied Kabul in 1504. A.D. After a few abortive attempts to re-establish himself in Central Asia, Babur directed his attention towards India. It was in April 1526 that he was able to lay the foundation of the Mughal Empire by defeating Ibrahim Lodi at the battle of Panipat. After the conquest of Delhi, Babur shifted his seat of government from Kabul to Delhi. Experience had shown that it was rather difficult to control Kabul from India. His son Humayun, who tried to wield authority from India, had accordingly to undergo many difficulties in trying to subjugate the area around Kabul. The Hindu Kush regions were usurped by his own brothers. After

being defeated by Sher Shah Suri, Humayun had to take shelter in Iran. It was only fifteen years later that on his return journey Humayun could subdue his brothers at Kabul and Kandahar and re-establish his dominion over India in 1555. Whenever the Persian kings were powerful enough they took back these areas. The tribes, never firm in their loyalties, inhabited these tracts, and shifted their allegiance as and when it suited them to do so, from the Mughals to the Persians and vice-versa.

The struggle for Kabul, Kandahar and Herat had been an important feature of the Mughal policy. From the north of Herat, an external invader from Persia or Central Asia could easily enter the Kabul Valley and India. As the master of Kabul, the Mughal Emperor must hold Kandahar or his dominion was unsafe. In an age when Kabul was a part of the Delhi Empire, Kandahar was India's indispensable first line of defence. Beside its strategic importance, Kandahar was also an important trade centre. The horses for Mughal cavalry were brought through Kandahar. Its importance was further increased in view of the Portuguese domination of the Arabian Sea.

After the death of Aurangzeb—the last of the great Mughals — the fabric of the empire fell to pieces. It was impossible for his successors to control Delhi, much less the far north-west. Circumstances were favourable to Afghans because Persia was also in a state of confusion.

The incompetence and weakness of the Persian and Indian empires, which used to control Afghanistan, inspired its people to overthrow alien overlordship. The chiefs of the powerful Ghilzai tribe, which at the close of the seventeenth century inhabited the area around Kandahar, were not slow to take advantage of the growing weakness of the later Safavids and Mughals to assume virtual independence in the early eighteenth century.

Persia was the first to attract the attention of the Afghans. In 1722, the Ghilzai chief Mahmud, encouraged by a successful raid which taught him that Safavid resistance was not likely to prove insurmountable, advanced on



Isphahan. The defeat at Gulnabad of a Persian force far more numerous than his own, enabled Mahmud to lay siege to Isphahan which capitulated after some resistance<sup>1</sup>. In 1725 Mahmud was succeeded by his cousin Ashraf, who shortly afterwards captured Tehran. The Ghilzai was, however, in a precarious position. He ruled by force of arms a people who greatly outnumbered his adherents and who detested him. His success in Persia resulted only from the decadence of the ruling house of that land. He could not hope to survive as a ruler of the Shah's dominions before any leader who could command the respect and win the allegiance of the Persian people<sup>2</sup>. And such a leader was now forthcoming.

Nadir Khan of the Afshar tribe, who had joined the army of Tahmasp in 1727 and, by his military and administrative genius, had quickly attained an important position, started to restore the power of the Safavids by ousting the Afghans. He started by first subduing the Abdalis of Herat and then attacked the Ghilzais of Isphahan. In a matter of weeks, Nadir Khan had restored Tahmasp to the Persian throne. In 1732, the Abdalis of Herat revolted and captured the city. Nadir Khan was not able to attack them until 1736, when he himself was crowned as king of Persia. This campaign of Nadir Khan (now Shah) led the Persians to capture Kandahar, and then Kelate-Ghilzai. After consolidating their conquest they overran Baluchistan. The road from Kandahar to India, which the Mughals used to protect as the main line of defence, was now in the hands of Nadir Shah.

At the advent of Nadir Shah, India was acutely suffering from intermittent outbreaks of anarchy. When Aurangzeb died in 1707, his empire which had extended upto Tungabhadra, and had been held together only by the force of his personality, began to fall to pieces with surprising rapidity. The usual wars of succession and the rapid change of emperors gave the central government no chance to recover or exert its authority over the provinces. Thus,

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<sup>1</sup>Sykes, *A History of Persia*, II, p. 229.

<sup>2</sup>Fraser-Tytler, *Afghanistan*, p. 41.

the picture of India in 1725, eighteen years after the death of Aurangzeb, was a strange one. The Empire had ceased to be a fact and was reduced to a mere shadow of its former self. The only statesman of ability at the time was Asif Jah Nizamul Mulk who, after vainly attempting to stem the tide against the Empire, had retired in 1724 to the viceroyalty of the Deccan which he governed in a state of independence. Saadat Khan Burhanul Mulk had taken over the rich province of Oudh which his more famous nephew, Safdar Jung helped to turn into an independent state. Bengal under Murshid Quli and Shujauddin Khan followed suit shortly afterwards. Punjab was in a state of disruption, the Sikh confederacy actively assisting in the process. The imperial authority had totally broken down in that vital province. The Emperor at Delhi, still the heir of a great and effective tradition and the source of all valid title to authority in India, ceased by perceptible and quick stages to be the wielder of effective power.

Thus, encouraged by the weakness of the central government and tempted by the fabulous wealth of the country, Nadir Shah crossed the Indus in 1739 at the head of a great army to emulate the exploits of his great predecessors. There was hardly any resistance on his way to Delhi. In great panic and confusion, Mohammad Shah, the unfortunate Emperor on whom the torn and decayed mantle of Akbar had descended, appealed to his recalcitrant viceroys vainly supplicating them for help.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Nadir Shah sacked Delhi and with ironic courtesy exchanged his *astrakhan* for the Mughal crown with enormous hanging emeralds in token of 'eternal brotherliness', and appropriated the treasures of the Empire, including the Kohi-noor and the Peacock Throne. The Persian seems to have been possessed of sardonic humour because on his departure he issued letters to the provincial rulers of India advising them 'to walk in the path of submission and obedience' to his dear brother (the despoiled Mohammad Shah), and threatening 'to blot them out of the pages of the book of creation'

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<sup>3</sup>*Seh Risala*, p. 39.

if they persisted in rebellion.<sup>4</sup>

After this gesture of fraternal solidarity Nadir Shah marched back to Persia. Delhi lay prostrate. The imperial treasury had no money. The Mughal army did not exist. In such a chaotic state the main danger came from the Maratha confederacy whose ruler Baji Rao had decided to assume the control of Hindustan.<sup>5</sup> The Government at Poona began to extend the Maratha hegemony. In 1757 they attacked Delhi and dictated the terms of peace to the puppet emperor, about the same time as the British were winning the field at Plassey. Raghunath Rao, their General, carried the Maratha conquest via Lahore to the fortress of Attock.

While India was passing through a period of turbulence, Afghanistan was for the first time emerging as an organized state. The Sadozais and Barakhzais, leading divisions of the powerful Abdali clan, took advantage of the growing weakness of Persia and India and made bid to assume virtual independence towards the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries. The realization of their ambitions was obstructed for a while by the rise of Nadir Shah. The Sadozais were the first to wrest power. In Ahmad Shah<sup>6</sup> the Afghans found a leader fully equipped to embark upon the task of integrating an unruly and turbulent people into a nation. His election to kingship was facilitated by the withdrawal in his favour of Haji Jamal Khan Barakhzai, father of Sirdar Paima Khan.

After consolidating his position, Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded India several times. In his first attempt in 1748, a last flicker of determination on the part of the Mughal imperial army sent back the Afghans in full retreat across the Indus.<sup>7</sup> In the next attempt, however, Mohammad Shah

<sup>4</sup>*Jehankushai Nadiri*, cited in *Tarikh-i-Sultani*, p. 93.

<sup>5</sup>Nizami, K.A., *Shah Waliullah Dehlavi Kay Siyasi Maktubat*, letter No. 2, to Ahmad Shah Abdali (tr.), p. 85 et seq.

<sup>6</sup>Ahmad Shah Abdali (Sadozai) was an outstanding general in Nadir Shah's army. On the death of Nadir Shah, Ahmad Shah was able to get a lion's share of the immense treasures which Nadir had accumulated.

<sup>7</sup>Tate, *Afghanistan*, p. 71.



could only save his capital by surrendering the trans-Indus territories to Abdali.<sup>8</sup> Shah Rukh, Nadir Shah's grandson and nominal ruler of Khurasan, came under the Afghan suzerainty about the same time. Thus by 1750, Ahmad Shah had assumed direct control of the mountains and all the country of the Hindu Kush lying between the Indus and the Oxus. His fifth invasion was different in nature from his earlier expeditions. In 1756-57 he did not come so much on his own as upon the invitation of Alamgir II to help the latter to stabilise his position. Abdali also followed the example of his predecessors in carrying away as much loot as possible, and left India in much the same unsettled condition in which he had found it.<sup>9</sup>

Political conditions in India continued to grow from bad to worse. The House of Babur was degenerating fast and the Emperor was powerless to arrest the intrigues that divided his nobility. Because of general disorganization that prevailed in the country, Maratha horsemen were continuously attracted northwards. They collaborated with the Sikhs and succeeded in driving Prince Timur, son of Ahmad Shah Abdali and governor of Lahore, across the Indus.<sup>10</sup>

At this critical juncture in Indian history, when anarchy, insecurity and instability knew no bounds, Shah Waliullah, an influential Muslim divine of Delhi, encouraged Najibuddaula at home and invited Ahmad Shah Abdali to come and rescue India.<sup>11</sup> Abdali was also assured of the help and support of the Rohillas and the kingdom of Oudh.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the sixth invasion of Ahmad Shah assumes historic importance. Not only on account of the unusual kind of invitation extended to him but also as he was called upon to vindicate Afghan overlordship of the Punjab which had been challenged by the Marathas in expelling his son from

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<sup>8</sup>*Seh Risala*, p. 38.

<sup>9</sup>Sykes, *Afghanistan*, I, p. 358.

<sup>10</sup>Tate, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>11</sup>Nizami, *Maktubat*, for Najibuddaula, p. 55 and letters Nos. 4-10, pp. 101-110; for Ahmad Shah Abdali, letter No. 2, pp. 83-98.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

Lahore. In 1759, therefore, a powerful Afghan army invaded the Punjab, and after restoring his authority Ahmad Shah marched towards Delhi. The Marathas tried to check him at Thaneshwar but were summarily defeated. The Rohillas and the Nawab of Oudh joined the side of the Afghans against the Marathas, apprehending that the success of the latter would spell for them constant and irksome interference in their affairs while the victorious Abdali must eventually retire to Kabul leaving them a much freer hand in the governance of their territories.<sup>13</sup>

The great confrontation took place two years later. On January 14, 1761, the Afghan and the Indian forces met on the historic field of Panipat to fight out one of the decisive battles of Indian history. The carnage was immense. The Maratha power was finally crushed. As a defeat it was complete.<sup>14</sup> This was a turning point in Indian history.

Nadir Shah's invasion of 1739 had irrevocably undermined the future of the Mughal Empire. The Panipat disaster put an end to the dreams of supremacy cherished by the Marathas. These two developments which shattered all reserves of power in Indian hands facilitated the extension of British dominion in India.

At this time, the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam was with the British in Bihar. The Afghan monarch expressed his willingness to help restore the Mughal suzerainty.<sup>15</sup> Shah Alam's mother Zeenat Mahal wrote to her son pressing him to come back to Delhi to meet Ahmad Shah and re-establish his authority<sup>16</sup>. Shah Alam, however, placed greater confidence in the efficacy of British support and refused politely to sue for the favour of Abdali.<sup>17</sup> As

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<sup>13</sup>Tate, *op. cit.*, pp. 77:87.

<sup>14</sup>Panikkar, *A Survey Of Indian History*, p. 238.

<sup>15</sup>Zeenat Mahal to Shah Alam, *vide* Political Proceedings of the Select Committee, 17 the March 1761, pp. 75-6, 79.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 79

<sup>17</sup>Shah Alam to Zeenat Mahal, PPSC, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-83. The proceedings provide a lucid description as to how the British dissuaded Shah Alam from accepting his mother's advice.

it turned out, the indifference and procrastination of Shah Alam proved fatal to his interests. Shah Abdali went back to Kabul.

During his remaining incursions into India, Ahmad Shah subdued the Sikhs in the Punjab and annexed Kashmir in 1762. At the same time he fixed the boundary of his empire on the Indus and abandoned northern Punjab to the Sikhs. In 1767, his professed object was to drive out the British from Bengal.<sup>18</sup> The Political Proceedings of the Governor-General's Council reveal that the British forces were then preparing to counteract the designs of Shujaudaula (the Nawab of Oudh) who was conspiring for the help of the Abdali.<sup>19</sup> But, with the passage of time, the fear of Ahmad Shah driving out the British from India was dissipated by the obvious unlikelihood of his following such a course with a none too friendly Sikh power at his rear in the Punjab and by the intrigues rife at the court of Delhi.

At the time of his death in 1773, Ahmad Shah's empire stretched from the Atrek river to the Indus, and from Tibet to the Arabian Sea.<sup>20</sup> His son, Timur Shah, ruled the Afghans peacefully for the next twenty years without expanding his dominions which he only managed to hold together in a somewhat infirm fashion. When Timur Shah died in 1793, his empire included Kashmir, Multan, Peshawar, all of Afghanistan south of Hindu Kush, Herat, and the provinces of Balkh and Khulm in the Oxus valley;<sup>21</sup> while Afghan suzerainty was acknowledged by Kalat, Baluchistan and Persian Khurasan. Sindh may also be included among his dependencies, although Mir Fateh Ali Khan of the Talpuras had paid no tribute to him for some years.<sup>22</sup> The Afghans, therefore, possessed an empire, which, from its base at Kabul, could have held its own against surrounding countries, dominated northern

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<sup>18</sup>GG in Council, Political Proceedings, 16th January p. 23.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup>*Tarikh-i-Afghanistan*, p. 27.

<sup>21</sup>*Tarikh-i-Timur Shah*, p. 97; Tytler, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>22</sup>Fraser-Tytler, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

India, and in competent hands might well have endured.<sup>23</sup> But princes weaker than those who, for the next quarter of a century, fought and intrigued for the Afghan throne while their empire fell to pieces around them, could hardly be imagined. Timur Shah had left behind some twenty-three sons to squabble over the Abdali throne and squander its fortunes. Finally, with the help of some powerful Afghan *sirdars*, Shah Zaman, a junior son of Timur Shah ascended the throne of Afghanistan in 1793.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.* p. 67.

<sup>24</sup>*Tarikh-i-Afghanistan*, p. 34.

# 2

## Evolution of Anglo-Russian Rivalry 1793—1809

Afghanistan threatened the peace of India.....tucked away in the heart of Asia.....it stood between the two slowly growing empires of the British on south and the Russians on the north.

—ISAIAH BOWMAN

### A. GENESIS OF BRITISH INTEREST IN AFGHANISTAN

**W**ITH 1793 ended the period when no European power was directly involved in moulding the course of events in and around Afghanistan. It also witnessed the beginning of that interesting epoch when the diplomatic rivalries of the European powers became clearcut on the chess-board of Central Asia. It was a period when the animosities and conflicts generated by the French Revolution were fresh in the minds of the European rulers. The comparatively quicker means of communications carried this current to Asia. The British in India were pushing their frontier towards Delhi and were also aspiring for the navigation of the Indus for the purposes of expanding their trade and commerce in and beyond Afghanistan. The French, the British

and the Russians were taking their turns at the court of Tehran to woo Persia. Soon after this game was complicated by Napoleonic manoeuvres at Tehran, threats of Zaman Shah's invasion of India and the Russian intrigues and expansions in Central Asia.

**(i) Threats of Zaman Shah**

Thus the period beginning with the reign of Zaman Shah marks a noticeable change in Afghanistan's relations with India, as they had so far existed. The European powers in the beginning of the Imperialist stage were trying to colonize and extend their tentacles over all those territories which they considered were governed by the weak, corrupt and unpopular rulers of Asia. Though the British had by this time annexed large territories, adding upto a huge empire in Asia, yet consolidation was surely needed, as a sizable area upto the 'scientific frontier' was controlled by the fighting and hostile people like the Rohillas, the Marathas, the Jats and the Sikhs. In the south of India, Tipu Sultan, aided and abetted by the foreign powers, was posing a serious challenge to the establishment of British hegemony. The French were training the armies of Tipu Sultan, the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Marathas and those of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab. The machinations of the French and the Russian agents in Persia and Central Asia were equally enhancing the difficulties of the British Empire builders. Thus, to meet the internal and external challenges, the British were trying to consolidate their rule near Delhi and attempting to expand the sphere of their influence further on to the North-West in their search for a safe and scientific frontier.

Meanwhile in Afghanistan, Shah Zaman, who had acquired the hazardous privilege of ruling a divided and tumultuous people, soon began to turn his attention to the invasion and conquest of India. As his talents were not equal to his ambitions, his achievements fell short of the magnitude of his designs. Moreover, there was too little security at home to ensure his success abroad. He was continually marching across the frontier, eager to extend the empire to the banks of the Ganges but every time



retracing his steps in alarm lest his own throne may be wrested from him in his absence. Although Zaman Shah could never advance beyond Lahore, the fear of his expeditions kept the British Indian Empire in a chronic state of unrest.

After the first abortive crossing of the Indus in 1795, when he was compelled to hasten back to Kabul to set his own house in order,<sup>1</sup> Zaman Shah started making detailed plans for 'his descent upon Hindustan'. After carefully examining the unsettled and undivided state of India, he despatched emissaries to several Indian rulers to enlist their co-operation in crushing 'the enemies of every one of the rulers so contacted'.<sup>2</sup> He also sent out spies to incite the Muslims to rise against the Sikhs and the Marathas at the time of his invasion.<sup>3</sup> After receiving a mission from Tipu Sultan<sup>4</sup> and getting favourable reports from his emissaries and secret agents, Zaman Shah twice crossed the Indus to reassert the claims of Ahmad Shah's Empire. Here it can be mentioned that when Zaman Shah was on the point of leaving Kabul in December 1796, Husen Khan Karaguzlu, the envoy of Agha Mohammad Khan of Persia, arrived. He was accorded a gracious reception and given sumptuous presents to return to Meshed. A certain Kado Khan Barakhzai accompanied the Persian ambassador as the Afghan envoy to the court of Kajar Prince.<sup>5</sup> From this it is evident that Zaman Shah was trying to buy safety for his western frontiers before embarking upon India.

The news of Zaman Shah's invasion created an unprecedented panic among the people of India. The Mughal Emperor at Delhi sent a mission to Shah Zaman with a promise to pay a large sum of money if the Afghan monarch could come and expel the Marathas from Delhi and thus help secure the Mughal throne.<sup>6</sup> The British Governor-General

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<sup>1</sup>*Tarikh-e-Afghanistan*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup>H.R. Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, III, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup>*Tarikh-e-Husaini*, p. 78

<sup>4</sup>Sir Alfred Lyall, *British Dominions*, pp. 208-9.

<sup>5</sup>Tate, *Afghanistan*, p. 104.

<sup>6</sup>GG in Council, Proceedings of the Select Committee, 25 January 1797, p. 185.

had already received Zaman Shah's communication which sought the cooperation of the British in crushing the Marathas.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the British were greatly perturbed by the 'wild Afghan hordes pouring down in their territory from their mountain fastness; and could not make up their mind whether it was in the British interest to support the Afghans against the Marathas<sup>8</sup>.

However, the dreaded invader could not prosecute his designs beyond Lahore. But the advance of the Afghan army and the occupation of Lahore did not fail to create a strong sensation throughout India. It was thought that an actual invasion of India would have thrown the whole country into a condition of anarchy. The Indian Muslims looked up to the Durrani king as their deliverer and hoped for the restoration of the House of Timur through Afghan intervention. The partisans of Zaman Shah set afoot intrigues in many parts of India. The Rohillas took up arms. Every Muslim anxiously looked forward to the coming of the 'Champion of Islam.' Dissensions among the Marathas had drawn their forces to the south. They were dismayed at the prospects and turned to the British for help. The attitude of the Sadozai King compelled the authorities in Calcutta to assemble a powerful army at Anupshahr. The news of the arrival of the Afghans in Lahore caused increased alarm in India. New armies were raised in anticipation of the further advance of Shah Zaman to Delhi. In 1790, M. de Boigne, a Frenchman, had been commissioned to raise a brigade of regular troops by Sindhia, and by 1793 his regular troops numbered 24,000 men with 130 guns, led by European officers of different nationalities, all under the command of M. de Boigne. This combination of trained and organised armies, it was expected, would have proved too strong for the undisciplined Afghan forces.<sup>9</sup>

The rumours of another invasion from Kabul in

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<sup>7</sup>H.R. Gupta, *op. cit.*, III, p. 56.

<sup>8</sup>J.W. Kaye, *History of War in Afghanistan*, I, p. 4; Frank Noyce, *England, India and Afghanistan*, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup>Tate, *op. cit.*, p. 105; Elphinstone, *Caubul*, II, p. 370.



1798-99 created an unusual air of expectancy among the rulers of India. Ghulam Mohammad of Rohilkhand marched with an army towards the Punjab with a view to inducing Shah Zaman to prosecute his designs further. This was followed by the agents of 'Asafuddaulah of Oudh' urging upon "His Afghan Majesty that all Muslims would gladly hail him as a deliverer."<sup>10</sup> Tipu Sultan had encouraged the Afghan Monarch to move further north inside India with an indication that his own army would join him in crushing the Marathas and driving the British out of India.<sup>11</sup>

At that time, however, the British in India knew little of the limitations which beset the resources of the Afghan Monarch, of the continually unsettled state of politics in Afghanistan, or of the incompetence of the Monarch himself to conduct any great enterprise. Distance and ignorance had magnified the danger. But the apprehensions which were then entertained were not wholly groundless either.<sup>12</sup> All the enemies of the British Empire had turned their eyes towards Zaman Shah to gain their freedom from 'the yokes of the usurping Franks'.<sup>13</sup> For this purpose, as has already been mentioned, invitations had gone forth to the Afghan Monarch with liberal promises of aid in money and men.

## (ii) The French Danger

The dangers emanating from the instability of political conditions in India and due to the projected ambitions of Zaman Shah, were no doubt problems, which however alarming in themselves were such that the British Indian Government could size up somehow. But soon the perils which seemed to threaten from beyond the Indus began to assume a more complicated and perplexing character.

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<sup>10</sup>Secret Report, No. 312, Foreign Dept. Miscel.

<sup>11</sup>An interesting discussion as to whether Zaman Shah was acting in concert with the anti-British rulers of India or not, is found in GG in Council, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2, and also Sir Alfred Lyall, *British Dominions*, pp. 208-9.

<sup>12</sup>Foreign Dept. Miscel., No. 79, pp. 10-12.

<sup>13</sup>Minutes of the GG in Council, 3 May 1800,

It was suspected that there was an intrigue of a more remote and insidious character to be combated—that of the active efforts of the French diplomacy in Persia.<sup>14</sup> And when it became known that the emissaries of Napoleon were endeavouring to contract alliances hostile to Great Britain all over Asia,<sup>15</sup> the position of Central Asian affairs came to be regarded with profound anxiety. It was no longer a question of military defence merely against the inroads of a single invader. The repeated failures of Zaman Shāh had considerably mitigated the alarm with which his movements were watched. The monarch had lost his importance as an independent enemy; but as a willing agent of a hostile confederacy, he did appear a much more formidable opponent. A lurking possibility of an anti-British alliance between France, Persia, and Kabul<sup>16</sup> led the British Indian Government to attempt to secure the friendship of Persia and preclude her from joining the dangerous combination. It was thought that if Persia were persuaded to threaten the western frontiers of Afghanistan, the prospects of Zaman Shah's success in his Indian expeditions would become remote. And with Persian friendship ensured, the British would have nothing to fear from the French intrigues in that quarter.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, in 1798, the British Indian Government under Lord Wellesley approached the Persian Government through the agent of the East India Company, Mirza Mahdi Ali Khan.<sup>18</sup> The agent was requested to persuade the Persian government to take measures to keep Zaman Shah in perpetual check so as to preclude him from returning to India.<sup>19</sup>

Shortly afterwards, the news of the last invasion of Zaman Shah gained currency, whereupon the British

<sup>14</sup>A French mission under Monsieur Olivier had reached Persia sometime in 1795. Vide Notes on C.U. Aitcheson, *Treaties and Sanads*, IX, p. 17/pp. 22-23.

<sup>15</sup>Duncan (Governor of Bombay) to Wellesley, No. 83, 1800-1.

<sup>16</sup>Duncan to Wellesley, Letter No. 83, January to May 1801.

<sup>17</sup>Notes from Aitcheson, *op. cit.*, IX, pp. 22-3; Kaye, I, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>18</sup>Duncan to Wellesley, Foreign Miscel. No. 79, 13 January, 1800.

<sup>19</sup>Credentials of British Agent, S/R No. 361.

Government decided to depute Captain John Malcolm to do the job in Persia.<sup>20</sup> This able and competent servant of the Company was charged with a delicate mission : to make arrangements with the Shah of Persia for relieving India from the recurring annual alarm of Zaman Shah's invasion which was always attended with serious expense to the East India Company, 'by occasioning a diversion upon his Persian provinces'; to counteract the possible attempts of the villainous but active democrats, the French; and to reopen and restore trade with Persia to somewhat of its former prosperity.<sup>21</sup>

However, time and circumstances did more for the British than their diplomacy. It was the ostensible object of Malcolm's mission to instigate the Shah of Persia to move an army upon Herat so as to divert Zaman Shah from his threatened invasion of India. The Persian move, which was to do so much for the British in India, had already been made before John Malcolm could appear in the court of Persia.<sup>22</sup> Actually, the plans for the Persian move were already afoot, in which the vulnerability of Herat and the presence of Prince Mahmud (a brother of Shah Zaman, former Governor of Herat exiled from Afghanistan) in the Persian camp offered special facilities. By keeping open the Herat question the plans of the Sadozai king with regard to India could have been thwarted; and the pretensions of the Shah of Persia, who regarded Herat as the province of the Persian Empire, rendered this course likely to succeed. As has been mentioned above, Shah Zaman sent an embassy to the Persian Court with a request that Khorasan, which was till then a part of the Afghan dominions, should be recognised by Persia as belonging to Afghanistan. In reply, Haji Ibrahim, the Minister of the Shah of Persia, was ordered to say that it was his master's intention to restore the south and eastern limits of Persia

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<sup>20</sup>H. Rawlinson, *Russia in Central Asia*, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup>Directions to Envoy in Persia, Secret Committee Proceedings 7, June 1800. Foreign Dept. Miscel.; Watson's *History of Persia*, p. 125 et seq.

<sup>22</sup>Correspondence of John Malcolm, Foreign Miscel., Nos. 125-209,

to the condition in which they had been in the time of the Safavid monarchs, and that the Shah proposed to overrun and annex Herat, Merve, Balkh, Kabul, Kandahar and Seistan. The dangers from Persia did not seem by any means imaginary with Prince Mahmud at hand as a convenient tool.<sup>23</sup>

Thus the fear, with which the British were watching the Afghan invasion and occupation of Rawalpindi and Lahore in the winter of 1798-99,<sup>24</sup> was short-lived. When Zaman Shah was preparing to attack Amritsar, to pave his way towards Delhi, he was informed that Fateh Ali Shah of Persia had attacked Khorasan and was threatening Herat<sup>25</sup> with a view to supporting the pretensions of Shah Mahmud to the throne of Afghanistan. The Afghan army was immediately withdrawn from India to meet the Persian threat.<sup>26</sup> With Zaman Shah becoming fully involved on his western frontiers, John Malcolm was able to assure his government that the Afghan Monarch would be kept occupied and would not have time and opportunity to make a successful descent upon India for some time to come.<sup>27</sup>

### (iii) Persia and Afghanistan Assume Importance

An important consequence of the threats of Zaman Shah's invasions was that they directed the attention of the British empire-builders to the strategic importance of Afghanistan. Britain could not afford to neglect customary invasion routes into northern India. But the British concern for and diplomacy around Afghanistan, in order to mitigate the possibility of an invasion from that quarter, did perhaps make the other European powers conscious of the vulnerability of the British Indian Empire from the land route. While both Russia and France did realize that it was well

<sup>23</sup>Tate, *op. cit.*, p. 111

<sup>24</sup>Elphinstone, *Caubul*, II, p. 370.

<sup>25</sup>Foreign Miscel., No. 128. 'The success of Malcolm's mission does not lie (so much) in Fateh Ali Khan's move towards Khorasan : but (due to) the fateful overtures of Shah Mahmud.' Mss. Cor. correspondence of John Malcolm, *vide*, Kaye, *op. cit.*, I, p.6 below.

<sup>26</sup>*Waqā-i-Zaman Shah*, Chap. I.

<sup>27</sup>Malcolm's information in GG in Council, May-June 1800,

nigh difficult to challenge the British supremacy on the seas, they thought it easily possible by land.

Also, neither Lord Wellesley nor Captain Malcolm were thinking only in terms of an Afghan invasion. Their excited imagination descried with ominous clarity the French in the distance, and when it became the duty of the diplomats 'to weave into the shape of a treaty' the defence policy of the British Indian Government, it was atonce apparent that apprehensions of the French intrigue and hostility were paramount in the minds of the Governor-General and his representative.<sup>28</sup> It would have been prudent to camouflage these apprehensions. But the British Government made no secret of these fears, and from that time onward it stood revealed to all the nations that the British Government considered Persia and Afghanistan as the high-road from Europe to the heart of their Indian Empire.<sup>29</sup>

Before the mission of Captain Malcolm to Persia, little was known in India, and probably nothing in Great Britain, about the Durrani Empire, the nature and extent of its resources, the quality of its soldiers and the character of its rulers. The information which Malcolm was able to acquire was not such as to occasion any serious alarm. The Durrani Empire which had since been shorn of some of its fairest provinces, then consisted of all Afghanistan, part of Khorasan, and the Derajat. The Sikhs of the Punjab had not till then gained the accession to strength which a few years later enabled them, under the military dictatorship of Ranjit Singh, to curb the pretensions and to mutilate the empire of their dominant neighbour.

The terms of the treaty proposed by Captain Malcolm were acceded to without much reluctance by the Persian court. The envoy was empowered either to offer a subsidy of three to four hundred thousand of rupees for a term of three years, or by a liberal distribution of presents to the king and his principal ministers to bribe them into acquies-

<sup>28</sup>Sir Henry Rawlinson, *England and Russia in the East*, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup>Comments of *The Expectator* quoted in Bonamy's Memorandum. Foreign Miscel., No. 225.



cence. Malcolm chose the latter course. He distributed his largesse unhesitatingly. Every difficulty melted away beneath the magic touch of the British gold. But the expense was heavy<sup>30</sup> and it was, of course, squeezed out of the blood and bones of the Indian people.

The clause of the proposed treaty that the French would not be allowed to enter Persia was criticised by the French as well as by the British diplomats.<sup>31</sup> The Treaty was never formally ratified and the Persian Court practically ignored its obligations as soon as it was no longer convenient to observe them. The treaty itself was rendered redundant as the French never reached the Asian soil; Napoleon being defeated in Egypt had gone back to France. The Afghans also managed in the next few years to 'ruin' themselves without requiring any external assistance whatsoever in the process.

The extent of the success of Captain Malcolm's mission was, however, disputed. To J. P. Ferrier : 'the (Persian) move which was to do so much for the British security in India, had been made before the British Ambassador appeared at the Persian Court'.<sup>32</sup> Sir Henry Rawlinson thought it 'erroneous to suppose that we (English) were indebted to the mission in question for our deliverance from the danger which threatened us'.<sup>33</sup> Sir J. W. Kaye was however equivocal : 'The mission was completely successful and they who do not trouble themselves to enquire too nicely into the relations of cause and effect, may accept this assertion of its success'.<sup>34</sup> But Captain Malcolm claims this credit to his mission with assurance that (his) 'policy had temporary success which was desired of diverting the invasion of India'.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Malcolm to GG, 26 July, 1800. Foreign Miscel., see text in Appendix I.

<sup>31</sup> It was described as 'an eternal disgrace to our Indian diplomacy' in *Sutherland's Sketches*, p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> *History of Afghans*, p. 72.

<sup>33</sup> *England and Russia in the East*, p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> *History of War in Afghanistan*, I, pp. 5-6.

<sup>35</sup> *History of Persia*, II, p. 215.

At this stage, however, an untoward incident led the British Indian Government to apprehend danger from Tehran. Immediately on John Malcolm's retirement, Haji Khalil Khan was despatched by Persia to pay the compliments of a return mission and to arrange for the ratification and interchange of the treaty. This dignitary lost his life at Bombay in 1802, in an affray between his servants and the guard of sepoy who were acting as his escort. Much embarrassment ensued, but ultimately liberal pensions having been provided for the relatives of the deceased, and full explanations having been tendered on the part of the Indian Government by the Company's Resident at Basra, the event was passed over as the inevitable stroke of fate.<sup>30</sup> No ill feeling was, however, left in the Persian mind as a result of the incident and the danger of friction was removed.

After Captain Malcolm's mission, the British Indian Government made no attempts, for several years, with regard to the treaty, although Persia was gradually passing under the influence of Russia and there was a noticeable increase in the European activities in Central Asia. It seems that the British were not expecting any Afghan invasion, for the time being at least, in view of the anarchy in Afghanistan which became rampant after the blindness and dethronement of Zaman Shah. The Persians were also in no position to threaten the British Indian Empire at the instance of either France or Russia.

This lull on the Afghan front provided the British Government time and opportunity to build up and consolidate their dominions in India, partly by curbing the power of Marathas and annexing their territories, and partly by securing a general control over the princely states by maintaining in their territories subsidiary forces and regulating their foreign policy.

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In Afghanistan, the most important event of this period

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<sup>30</sup>Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

was the rise of the Barakhzais<sup>37</sup> as king-makers. It was Haji Jamal Khan, head of the Barakhzais and the father of Sirdar Paimda Khan who withdrew himself in favour of Ahmad Shah Abdali. Paimda Khan remained loyal to Timur Shah and helped him retain his dominions. It was only he who, after Timur's death, helped Zaman Shah to the throne of Kabul. However, due to some intrigue in which Paimda Khan was allegedly involved, Zaman Shah first got him blinded and, afterwards, beheaded in callous disregard of the importance and magnitude of the service rendered to him by the great Sirdar. This event led Fateh Khan and other sons of Paimda Khan, some 23 in number, to support Shah Mahmud against Shah Zaman. The result was obvious. After installing Ranjit Singh at Lahore, when Zaman Shah hurried back to Kabul, he was defeated, blinded and finally had to take refuge with the British at Ludhiana. The Barakhzais could not support Shah Mahmud also for long and finally managed to dethrone him. Shah Shuja, a favourite brother of Zaman Shah, then became the king of Afghanistan. Shah Shuja's position was never well established at Kabul. The rivalry among his sirdars always threatened his throne. Afghanistan had become a hotbed of intrigue and insecurity. This was, of course, not wholly the fault of the Afghan chiefs who used to dabble in the intrigues of Afghan kingship. The Afghans, ever since the days of Ahmad Shah, wanted a stable, strong and cooperative rule. The descendants of Ahmad Shah certainly backed the qualities of providing such a government and thus brought about the downfall of the Abdalis (Sadozais). These convulsions, hastened the diminution of the heterogeneous empire of Ahmad Shah Abdali and provided opportunity for the quick expansion of Ranjit Singh's dominions.<sup>38</sup>

During this tumultuous period Shah Shuja and Shah Mahmud ruled Afghanistan by turn. Their destinies, however, remained in the hands of the powerful Barakhzai

<sup>37</sup>Saiyid Qasim Rishtia, *Afghanistan dar Qarn-i-Nuzda*, the first four chapters provide a detailed and authentic account of this revolutionary and anarchic period of Afghanistan during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

<sup>38</sup>Rishtia, *op. cit.*, p. 35 et seq.



Sirdar, Fateh Khan whose energies and influence also sustained the drooping sovereignty of the Sadozai rulers.<sup>39</sup> But it was between 1816-18 that the breach between the Sadozais and the Barakhzais reached its climax. Shah Mahmud wanted to become a *de facto* ruler in his own right. His son Prince Kamran hatched a conspiracy at Herat and got sirdar Fateh Khan blinded and finally slain in 1818. This roused the brothers of Fateh Khan against the Sadozais, and his brother Dost Mohammad Khan eventually started the rule of the Barakhzais.

The Barakhzais, following the examples of Haji Jamal Khan and Sirdar Paima Khan, continued to help and assist the Sadozai monarchs so long as they could. At first they made use of princelets of the Sadozai family as puppets, but very soon they were able to dispense with this pretence as well. The incompetence, treachery and ingratitude of the Sadozai rulers exasperated them so much that they finally brushed aside the Sadozai dynasty altogether.<sup>40</sup> But, still, when they became the masters of Afghanistan, they preferred to call themselves simply Amirs and not kings. It was only in 1919, about a century later, that Sirdar Amanullah Khan declared himself king in order to terminate even the semblance of British control over the affairs of Afghanistan.

## B. DIPLOMATIC PROBING IN THE NORTH-WEST

The pattern of external relations was changing again in the north-west. The events in Persia and Central Asia were moving in a manner which required the Calcutta Council Chamber to take positive measures for the security of the Indian Empire.

The Russians were moving towards the Persian border they had defeated a Persian army and annexed the Persian

<sup>39</sup>Rishtia, *op. cit.*, Chaps. I-V; *Tarikh-e-Sultani*, p. 198.

<sup>40</sup>The Sadozai rulers after Ahmad Shah, murdered the chief (Barakhzai) benefactors who made them the kings... Shah Zaman and his brothers, Mahmud and Shuja, seem alike to have forgotten, on their elevation to throne, that they ruled a people whose genius was republican... The community had no shadow of regret to have overthrown such proud and arrogant rulers." 'A. Burnes, *India and Russia* dated 5 May. 1833, Foreign Miscel. Mss. No. 305.

province of Gilan (Georgia) in 1801.<sup>41</sup> The King of Persia's appeal for help to the British Government under the terms of Malcolm's treaty of the same year, evoked no response. Perhaps the reason underlying British silence was that they were, at that time, allies of Russia in Europe.

The French, who were for some time intriguing at Tehran, realising that Persia resented the recent annexation of Georgia by the northern power, made proposals to her for an alliance against the common enemy. Fateh Ali Shah was, at first, unwilling to come to terms with France, but due to the absence of a British representative to maintain British influence at Tehran and the procrastination of the British Government in London to whom the matter of giving assistance to Persia had been referred to by the Government of India, the Persian Monarch finally agreed to join hands with France against Russia by the Treaty of Finkestein, 1807.<sup>42</sup> It was also reported that the Shah had promised to support the French, if they embarked upon an invasion of India via Afghanistan, and that the French, in turn, had promised to help in ousting the Russians from the Persian soil.<sup>43</sup>

A few months later General Gardanne appeared in Persia at the head of an important military mission, and it was rumoured that the French general was to train the Persian troops who were intended to march with the French army across Afghanistan to India.<sup>44</sup> The Persians had, in the meantime, taken advantage of the internal division of Afghanistan and annexed Khorasan, which was till then a tributary of Afghanistan. This also threatened Herat.<sup>45</sup>

In 1807, the dangers posed by the French and the Russians separately, tended to combine themselves in the Treaty of Tilsit. Tsar Alexander and Napoleon Bonaparte made plans for an invasion of India 'by a confederate army uniting on the plains of Persia, and no secret was made of the intention of the two European potentates to commence,

<sup>41</sup>Sykes, *Persia*, II, p. 311.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 304.

<sup>43</sup>Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>44</sup>Sykes, *Persia*, II, pp. 504-5.

<sup>45</sup>Malcolm, *Persia*, II, p. 214.

in the following spring, a hostile demonstration *contre les possessions de la compagnie des Indes*.<sup>46</sup> But Fatch Ali Shah of Persia was deeply chagrined by the Franco-Russian accord, and naturally so, since it contained no reference to the return of Georgia to Persia;<sup>47</sup> and, yet, the French, with somewhat misplaced optimism, undoubtedly hoped to retain the Shah as their ally against the British, and, with Persian assistance, to launch a Franco-Russian army against India<sup>48</sup>.

To provide against the materialization of such ominous designs, both the London and Calcutta Governments took immediate cognizance of the situation. Firstly, there was a recognition of the strategic importance of Persia; Compensatory steps were taken to provide for the British neglect of Malcolm's Treaty of 1801, and of their failure to observe the terms of the treaty which stipulated help to Persia against Russian aggression. Actually, the threat against which the British tried to provide was that of France, whose influence continued to be strong at the Court of Tehran, despite the Persian mortification at the nature of the Franco-Russian agreement of Tilsit. In fact, the French menace, in those days seemed real, and Napoleon's grandiose schemes for driving through Persia and Afghanistan were taken seriously.<sup>49</sup> The final defeat of Napoleon however, once again brought a lapse in Britain's solicitude of Persian friendship. It was not till later that the British realized the more dangerous and continuing threat of Russia. Secondly, it was decided by Lord Minto, the then Governor-General of India, in conjunction with the British Cabinet,<sup>50</sup> that in order to prevent a hostile army from crossing the Indus, it was necessary and expedient to cultivate friendship and close cooperation with the rulers of Persia, Afghanistan,

<sup>46</sup>John Adye, *Indian Frontier Policy*, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup>Malcolm, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>48</sup>Sykes, *Afghanistan*, I, p. 379.

<sup>49</sup>Sir. Alfred Lyall, *The Rise of British Dominion in India*, pp. 232, 238-42.

<sup>50</sup>British Government's instructions to Lord Minto, Secret Committee of the Court of Directors of the East India Company, 2 March, 1808, *vide* Norris, *op. cit.*, p. 10.





the Amirs of Sindh and Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Lahore (Punjab), and thereby to consolidate a bulwark against any such danger. The plan was put into operation by sending Captain David Seton to Sindh, Charles Metcalfe to Lahore, Mountstuart Elphinstone to Afghanistan and Captain John Malcolm once again to Persia.<sup>51</sup>

### (i) Malcolm & Jones to Persia

The London Government, in order to take some positive step on her own, decided to despatch Sir Harford Jones to deal with the anti-British situation in Persia and to forestall the possibility of any danger emanating from that quarter, by promising aid to the Shah against any external enemy.<sup>52</sup> But Malcolm was already on his way from Bombay to Persia when Harford Jones arrived in India. However, French influence was still strong at Tehran General Gardanne was then basking in the full sunshine of the Court's favour. He was training the Persian army and constructing fortifications; and the Shah of Persia had not yet given up hope of the return of Georgia through French influence. Malcolm, therefore, was treated with scant courtesy and was debarred from visiting Tehran. He was so much upset by this rebuff that he immediately returned to India and urged the Governor General to despatch an expedition to seize the Persian island of Kharak.<sup>53</sup> In the meanwhile, the political climate of Europe changed in favour of Britain by which the expedition lost its *raison d'être* and was called off. Jones waited, and his patience was rewarded. By the autumn of 1808, General Gardanne had overplayed his hand, and Fateh Ali Shah had realized that the French were powerless to secure the return of Georgia. Gardanne was then given his passports; and Sir Harford Jones, who had by then proceeded to Persia as the accredited representative of the British Crown, was welcomed to Tehran and afforded a splendid reception.

The success of Sir Harford Jones, the envoy of the London Government, and the failure of Sir John Malcolm,

<sup>51</sup>*Camb. History of India*, V, p. 486.

<sup>52</sup>Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>53</sup>Sykes, *Persia*, II, p.307.

the representative of the government of India, evoked quite a bit of fuss and friction between the two governments. Although the relations with Persia were hitherto in the hands of the Indian Government, the British Government in its instructions to Governor-General Lord Minto, dated March 2, 1808, had excluded treating with Persia from the Calcutta Government's immediate purview.<sup>54</sup> By the omission it was implied that the relations with Persia were brought, for a time, within the orbit of the Foreign Office. Lord Minto had apparently despatched John Malcolm in continuation of the existing practice, and was greatly annoyed because he was neither consulted nor informed before the change was effected. Sir Harford Jones was to act under the orders of the Governor General in Council, and Lord Minto's displeasure can be gauged from the fact that he ordered the suspension of Jones' functions.<sup>55</sup>

In spite of the ill-feeling caused by the proposal, to send a British expedition to Kharak, and the known hostility of Lord Minto to Harford Jones, the latter's proposals for an alliance with Persia were accepted by Fateh Ali Shah.<sup>56</sup> The success of Jones' mission was a British success, and the official pride of the Indian Government was appeased by the appointment of Sir John Malcolm to lead the mission to Tehran in 1810 to ratify the treaty.<sup>57</sup> However, the Foreign Office continued to have a dominant say in Persian affairs with the Calcutta Government playing only as a second fiddle until 1826 when the Indian Government was restored its control. But the envoy to Persia used to get a letter of notification from the Foreign Office—'enough to maintain the connexion with London but not enough to convince other powers that the envoy had any real authority'.<sup>58</sup> This uncertain duality of authority and responsibility between the London and Calcutta Governments with

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<sup>54</sup>*Vide* Norris, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>55</sup>Sykes, *Persia*, II, p. 307.

<sup>56</sup>Aitcheson, XII, p. 46. The treaty is discussed later in the following pages, alongwith the *Definite Treaty* of 1814; see the text of the treaty in Appendix II.

<sup>57</sup>The definite or final treaty was signed at Tehran in 1814.

<sup>58</sup>Norris, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

regard to Persia tended to weaken the British influence at Tehran at a critical period, and contributed in a way to the several causes of the First Afghan War.<sup>59</sup>

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## (ii) Metcalfe to Ranjit Singh

In the Punjab, Zaman Shah's invasions (1793-99) had generated a feeling among the Sikhs to integrate themselves in some sort of a union of their own. The hostility of the Sikhs had been a major factor in checking and stemming the tide of the Afghan forces. Shah Zaman had eventually realized the impossibility of leading a successful expedition to Delhi. Thus, while returning to Afghanistan, he had to agree to the suggestion of friendly Sikh chiefs to choose a Sikh as the future governor of Lahore in preference to an Afghan. His choice fell on Ranjit Singh, under whose able guidance the Sikh nation soon developed into a formidable fighting machine in northern India.

In the chain of British north-west defence policy, Punjab was of key importance. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Ranjit Singh, the greatest of the Sikh rulers, had consolidated a powerful kingdom, north-west of the river Sutlej, and seemed likely to extend his empire as far as the river Jamuna.<sup>60</sup> He was aided on the one hand by the weakness of the Afghans and on the other by the policy of the British, who seemed disinclined at first to interfere with him because of the more serious struggle with the Marathas.<sup>61</sup>

Lord Lake and Arthur Wellesley had defeated Sindhia and Holkar in a series of great battles, the result of which was to increase the importance of the British in the north-west, and to make the relations between the Sikhs and the British more vital. When, in 1805, Holkar fled to Amritsar, Ranjit Singh was too clever to help him against Lord Lake; and the ensuing treaty of Lahore<sup>62</sup>, concluded on January, 1, 1806, kept the Marathas out of the Punjab,

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup>*Camb. History of India*, V, p. 539.

<sup>61</sup>Foreign Miscel., Nos. 206 and 305.

<sup>62</sup>*Roos Namcha-i-Shah Shuja*, p. 26.

secured for Ranjit Singh the friendship of the British, and left the Sikhs free from the British interference for the time being.<sup>63</sup>

This state of affairs, however, was not destined to last long. Several Sikh states had risen to virtual independence as a result of the gradual decline of the Mughal power but they were engaged in a constant strife among themselves, and the unsettled state of their country invited the ambition of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Lord Lake had considerable dealings with some of these Punjab states and it was natural that the prospect of the establishment of Ranjit Singh's power in this part of the country was viewed with some concern. When he had crossed the Sutlej a second time in 1807, the chiefs of these states became sufficiently alarmed to send and ask for British protection.<sup>64</sup>

In 1808, at the time when the possibility of a French invasion of India was very much in the air and although the prospects of this menace could not be calculated with any degree of precision, Sir Charles Metcalfe was sent on a mission to Ranjit Singh with the purpose of arranging a treaty, and at the same time assurances of protection were given to the frightened chiefs.<sup>65</sup>

This mission of Metcalfe was duly briefed to be alive to the apprehension entertained by Lord Minto that "Any act of hostility and discourtesy on our part might throw him (Ranjit Singh) into the arms of Holkar and Sindhia, and other native princes, and a confederacy might be formed against us that would disturb the peace of India for years to come."<sup>66</sup> For a moment it seemed likely that the negotiations would fall through. While the British agent was present in his land, Ranjit Singh crossed the Sutlej for the third time, and seized Faridkot, Ambala and Malerkotla, the Punjab states which had asked for the protection of the British Government, and would have taken Patiala had he not feared British intervention.<sup>67</sup> But the advance

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<sup>63</sup>Capt. Wade's letter, 1 August 1827.

<sup>64</sup>Captain Wade, 'Punjab & Ranjit Singh'. Foreign Miscel., No. 206.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*



of David Ochterlony with a detachment and "the adroitness of the young diplomat (Metcalf) who is said to have assured the Sikh chieftain that he could make conquests in other directions with British non-interference"<sup>68</sup> caused Ranjit Singh to pause. On February 9, 1809, Ochterlony issued a warning proclamation to the effect that any further aggression by the Maharaja would be forcibly resisted, and this coupled, as Cunningham suggests,<sup>69</sup> with the fear that some of the Punjab chiefs might also seek British protection,<sup>70</sup> brought Ranjit Singh to terms. He signed the Treaty of Lahore on April, 25, 1809. Under the terms of this Treaty it was acknowledged that the Maharaja should not extend his conquest to the East of Sutlej, that the British on their part should confine themselves to river (Sutlej); and the infringement of these terms by either party was to be considered by the other as the declaration of hostilities.<sup>71</sup> The last clause gave the British a right of passage for their army through the Sikh territories in case of foreign aggression, and the Sikh chiefs undertook to help the British in their task of defence.<sup>72</sup> The spirit of the treaty did not comprehend any pledge of support to Ranjit Singh by the British in any purely aggressive designs against Kabul.<sup>73</sup> The intention was to follow the policy of non-interference concerning the relations of the friendly powers, as just then Mountstuart Elphinstone was on his way to Shah Shuja. The continuation of this policy can be observed in the British attitude over the Dost Mohammad-Ranjit Singh controversy concerning Peshawar in 1830s.

For sometime, as was but natural, Ranjit Singh continued to intrigue with the Marathas but gradually his fears of British invasion vanished and he became loyal to the

<sup>68</sup>*Camb. Hist. of India*, V, p. 540.

<sup>69</sup>Ochterlony to Govt., 77 March 1809; Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

<sup>70</sup>Sykes, *Afghanistan*, I, p. 387.

<sup>71</sup>For. Miscel., No. 206., p. 78.

<sup>72</sup>Aitcheson, *op. cit.*, VIII, p. 144; see also Appendix III

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*

terms of the treaty.<sup>74</sup>

### (iii) Elphinstone to Shah Shuja

The guardian of the strategic Hindu Kush required a more careful solicitation. The power of the Afghan monarch was gauged by the memory of the days when Ahmad Shah Abdali had marched to the gates of Delhi and defeated the Marathas at the field of Panipat. Since then, the disaffected in India had looked towards the king of Afghanistan for help and support. To him the Muslim potentates of India had addressed their complaints against the Marathas, while others had invited him to come to India and salvage them from the yokes of the British. In the scheme of their defence strategy in 1807, therefore, the British had come to regard the Afghan monarch as the key person to be approached and befriended. Thus, the British mission under Mountstuart Elphinstone, accompanied by all the prerequisites of magnanimity, left Delhi on October 13, 1808 for the court of Shah Shuja.<sup>75</sup>

During his stay at Multan, Elphinstone wrote a long letter<sup>76</sup> to the Governor General, pointing out the advantage of the strong frontier defences provided by 'the rivers of the Punjab, the Indus and the desert' and at the same time cautioning his Government about the strategic importance of Afghanistan: 'For if they (French) were once in possession of it, and succeeded in installing themselves securely at Caubul, an invasion of our territories by them would no longer be a great and desperate enterprise, but an attempt which they might make without risk when they pleased and repeat the attempt when the state of our affairs held out prospects of their success.'<sup>77</sup> In order to counteract the danger of any foreign power, whether French or Russian, obtaining paramount influence at the court of Kabul, Elphinstone asked for specific instructions about the extent of economic aid he might offer in case he found it necessary to

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<sup>74</sup>Foreign Miscel. No. 305.

<sup>75</sup>Elphinstone, *Caubul*, I, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup>Forrest, *Elphinstone*, p. 27.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*

counteract similar French promises, if any, and what precise assistance he should promise, because without definite promises and something tangible to negotiate on, he would neither be able to persuade the Afghan monarch to realize the dangers of Franco-Russian combination to Afghan integrity,<sup>78</sup> nor would he be able to stay long in Kabul as 'the Afghan...*idea* of an ambassador being always charged with some important communication, that their etiquette allows him only one audience to deliver his message, receive a reply, and take his leave.'<sup>79</sup>

Things had changed since the despatch of Elphinstone's mission, and accordingly, he was instructed by his government that the important events which had occurred in Europe would necessarily induce a modification of the course of policy to be pursued at the court of Kabul.<sup>80</sup> He was told that it was no longer necessary to provide for the contingency of any offensive operations against Persia, but that the British Government would agree to enter into engagements of a purely defensive nature, should such a stipulation help in enlisting the friendship of the Afghan Monarch. This was mentioned, perhaps, merely as an admissible course. The Governor General declared that he would wish, if possible, to avoid contracting even defensive engagements with the court of Kabul, and added 'should contracting those engagements be absolutely required by the king, the eventual aid to be afforded by us ought to be limited'.<sup>81</sup> Forming a friendly connection with Kabul was considered a measure of importance, as well as an object of sound long term policy, keeping in view the possibility of either the French or any other European powers or combination of powers endeavouring to approach by that route.

Shah Shuja, the king of Kabul, was on his way to Peshawar when he received the news of the arrival of the British mission, and, as was natural, the object of the mission was regarded with strong prejudice and distrust.

<sup>78</sup>Secret Correspondence, GG in Council, 14 December 1808.

<sup>79</sup>Forrest, *Elphinstone*, p. 28.

<sup>80</sup>Kaye, *op. cit.*, I, p. 84.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid* p. 85,

The Afghan lords were opposed to an alliance which would strengthen the power of the king to the detriment of the aristocracy.<sup>82</sup> The king himself, being then much troubled by the discussions among his own people thought it very natural that the British should try to profit by the internal dissensions of a neighbouring kingdom and endeavour to annex it to their own empire. However, after receiving exaggerated reports of the splendour of the Embassy and the sumptuous presents by which it was accompanied, the Shah consented to admit the mission, and give it an honourable reception.<sup>83</sup> This was the first official contact between Afghanistan and British India.

After having private interviews with Shah Shuja it became quite clear to Elphinstone that the king was well informed, had definite ideas as to how things should be done and was prepared to enter into specific engagements with the British Government on the basis of reciprocity. Although the Envoy himself had definite views, on the basis of his brief, he could not offer definite engagements. The king had a dangerous internal revolution to cope with, while the British wanted him to contract an alliance concerning a remote danger which the Shah could not fathom, and yet they were unwilling to give him any aid against his own enemies.<sup>84</sup>

The Afghans were shrewd enough to see that the British wanted to strike a very one-sided bargain. They considered 'an alliance for the purpose of repelling one enemy was imperfect and that true friendship between the two states could only be maintained by identifying their interests in all cases.'<sup>85</sup> To Shuja, the real threat to his position came from his own half-brother, Shah Mahmud who was soliciting Persian help to recover his throne. Elphinstone realized that the only way the Persians, and through them the French, could have obtained influence

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<sup>82</sup>*Rooznamcha-i-Shah Shuja*, p. 62.

<sup>83</sup>Forrest, *Elphinstone*, p. 29.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid* p. 31.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid*.

over Kabul was by supporting Mahmud against Shuja. Therefore, he warned the Governor General that if such a situation materialized, the Afghans might not require British assistance altogether: as, in that case, Shah Shuja would be overthrown, 'dissipating all the fruits of...alliance with it'.<sup>86</sup> And further, in the face of a Franco-Persian attack, a weak Afghanistan might have cost the British Government millions to achieve later on, what could have been accomplished in thousands at that time. Elphinstone's suggestion was to contract a defensive alliance against the French and the Persians, eschewing all desire to meddle in domestic quarrels of the Afghans, and finally to help Shah Shuja, short of supplying troops, in quelling the disturbances within his dominions.<sup>87</sup> This would have been a reasonably justifiable basis of the proposed alliance.

In spite of his reasonable thinking as a man on the spot, Elphinstone had to act in accordance with the instructions of his government. He was unable to exceed his brief and continued to press upon the Afghan only one thing—the desirability of concluding a treaty against the common enemies. The Afghans, on their part, continued to beseech the envoy to give assistance to their sovereign, to enable him to suppress the rebellion of his brother which was growing formidable every day<sup>88</sup>.

However, after prolonged negotiations, the events in Afghanistan developed in a manner that helped Elphinstone to surmount the difficulties in his task of persuading the Afghans to conclude the kind of treaty his government wanted. By the terms of the treaty, Shah Shuja undertook to prevent the passage through Afghanistan of French and Persian troops on their way to India; and the British Government promised to pay the Afghans for their services against the 'Confederacy'. Lastly, the Afghans were to exclude all Frenchmen from their territories.<sup>89</sup> Actually,

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<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>88</sup> *Rooznamcha, op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>89</sup> Text of the Treaty in the Appendix IV. Shah Shuja and Mountstuart Elphinstone concluded the treaty at Peshawar on 9 April 1809 and it was signed by the Governor General at Calcutta on 17 June 1809.



the troubles of Shah Shuja had increased to such an extent that he would have made any terms with the English in the hope of gaining their assistance against his internal enemies.<sup>90</sup>

The treaty soon became a dead letter as a few days later Shah Shuja's army was defeated by Shah Mahmud in a pitched battle near Kabul. The destruction of his army in Kashmir had already disheartened him. Elphinstone tried once more to help the Shah by proposing to Lord Minto to receive the province of Sindh, which the Shah still considered as part of his dominions, in return for the money to be paid to the Afghan Monarch. The proposal did not find favour with the Governor General.<sup>91</sup> In the meanwhile, Shah Shuja, after several reverses, had to quit his country for a long exile with the British in Ludhiana, eventually to be restored thirty years later to his throne by an ill-fated expedition that cost the English an army and the Shah his life.

#### (iv) Seton and Smith to Sindh

British interest in the affairs to Sindh began early in the eighteenth century when certain merchants wanted trade facilities through the river Indus. This was between 1711 and 1725. Due to the internal struggle among the rulers of Sindh and their anti-British attitude, both the British Resident and the factories were withdrawn.<sup>92</sup> During the rule of Ahmad Shah Abdali, Sindh became a part of the Afghan dominions. Towards the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, Sindh became a hotbed of internal intrigue and disorder, when the Afghan hold over it had considerably weakened due to the squabbles over the Kabul throne.

It was in 1799 that Lord Wellesley, in order to provide against the designs of Napoleon, made efforts to revive the commercial relationship with Sindh. After some initial

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<sup>90</sup>Forrest, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>91</sup>GG in Council, Proceedings, 1809; Forrest, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>92</sup>P.N. Khera, *British Policy Towards Sindh*, p. 3.

probing Nathan Crow of the Bombay civil service was despatched to further the Company's commercial and political interests. The influence of Zaman Shah, the intrigue of Tipu Sultan's agents and the jealousy of local traders, aided by an anti British party, led to the ouster of the British Resident from Hyderabad (Sindh). <sup>93</sup>

British interest towards Sindh was once more activated in 1807 when Napoleon concluded the alliance of Tilsit with the Emperor of Russia with the object of undertaking a combined invasion of India by land. To forestall this danger, the British Government had decided to erect a bulwark of alliances with the intervening states. Accordingly, in July 1808, Captain David Seton was despatched to the Amirs of Sindh. Unlike the caution displayed by Elphinstone in dealing with Shah Shuja, Captain Seton, misunderstanding and exceeding his instructions, hastily executed a treaty with the Amirs, imposing severely and unconditionally, upon each party an obligation to furnish military aid to the other in case of aggression, and neither side would protect the enemies of the other. <sup>94</sup> The mind of the envoy was so much charged with the thoughts of French invasion, and especially, in face of the Persian envoy offering Persian and French help to the Amirs, that the anxiety to make adequate provision against the menace made him oblivious of the necessity to steer clear of a course of over-committing his government. The Amirs were at that time intent upon emancipating themselves from the yoke of Kabul, as well as from the likelihood of interference from Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Lahore. Captain Seton found that he had committed the British Government to assist the Sindh Amirs against the king of Kabul and the Maharaja of Lahore, thereby placing his government in direct hostility with those very powers whose good offices they were so anxiously cultivating. <sup>95</sup> In October 1808, therefore, Lord Minto repudiated the engagements entered into by Captain

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<sup>93</sup>Duncan to Wellesley, For. Miscel Nos. 79-81.

<sup>94</sup>Aitcheson, *op. cit.*, XI, p. 336; Norris, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>95</sup>For. Miscel., No. 305.



Seton as contrary to the instructions given to him, and he was recalled.<sup>96</sup>

The Governor General authorized fresh negotiations and Nicholas Hankey Smith was sent to secure the frontiers of India against aggression by arranging a defensive agreement with the Amirs. In the beginning, the Amirs assumed a very haughty tone over the setting aside of their engagement with Seton. It was by a remarkable diplomatic skill that Smith brought the Amirs gradually to the British line of argument. He kept the Amirs in check by hinting at the possibility of his Government's assistance being made available to Kabul for their coercion<sup>97</sup> in case they did not come to terms with him. The treaty which was signed was the first of its kind. It was a brief agreement consisting of only four articles and contained little significance.<sup>98</sup> It began with the usual profession of 'eternal friendship' between the two parties and there was a promise to exchange 'Vakeels' regularly. The Amirs promised not to 'allow the establishment of the tribe of the French' in Sindh. But they declined to grant new commercial facilities or to receive a permanent British political agent, for the British made no military commitments either.

Diplomatically, the treaties proved hardly of much use immediately. Both the French and the Russians became so much involved in Europe that they ceased, at least for a time, to be formidable in Central Asia; and Persia, through which the Franco-Russian danger was visualised, became a friend of the British. Much of the expediency that had made the signing of the treaties desirable, had ceased to exist. While Maharaja Ranjit Singh saw in the treaty of Lahore an implied non-interference by the British in his westward expansion, he continuously encroached upon the Afghan territories and eventually annexed Peshawar which became a bone of contention between the Sikhs and the

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<sup>96</sup>For. Miscel., No. 261.

<sup>97</sup>Kaye, *op. cit.*, I, p. 92.

<sup>98</sup>Text of the Treaty in Appendix V.

Afghans, under Dost Mohammad Khan, and developed into one of the major causes of the First Afghan War. Shah Shuja's relationship with the British, which began with Elphinstone's embassy and developed into an inexplicable friendship during Shuja's long sojourn at Ludhiana, involved the British into taking an unwise decision to restore the Shah on the Afghan throne in 1838.

On the other hand, the envoys and the members of these missions accumulated quite a lot of useful information<sup>99</sup> concerning the states, so important for the future development and stability of the British Empire as well as for the formulation of a sound British policy in relation thereto. The British became fully alive to the strategic importance of the north-western frontier. But all this meant heavier expense to the East India Company than was considered consistent with public security and interest.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Apart from published and unpublished correspondence and papers the following may be mentioned here: (i) M. Elphinstone, *Kingdom of Caubul*, 2 Vols. & Sir John Malcolm, *History of Persia*, 2 Vols; (ii) MSS:E. Pottinger, *Memoirs*, For. Miscel. 366; & John Malcolm, *Russia*, For. Miscel. 209.

<sup>100</sup>Company's Board of Control, Drafts of Secret Letters and Despatches, June 1810, III, first series.

# 3

## **Towards an Indo-Afghan Frontier 1809-1830**

Frontiers are indeed the Razor's Edge on which hang suspended the Modern issue of war or peace, of life or Death to nations.

CURZON

**A**FTER the dethronement of Zaman Shah, Afghanistan remained, for about twenty years, without any strong and capable ruler. His brothers, Shah Shuja and Shah Mahmud, who followed him as rulers of Afghanistan, could not carry the whole country with them and were mere puppets in the hands of the Barakhzai brothers.<sup>1</sup> Fateh Khan, the most powerful among the Barakhzai sirdars, assumed the role of a king-maker. Thus, after Zaman Shah, Afghanistan remained in a state of anarchy till 1818, when Dost Mohammad Khan, the youngest of the Barakhzai brothers, brushing aside the ruling family of Sadozais, started organising and uniting the country.

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\* Romanes Lectures, 1907.

<sup>1</sup>Sons of Sardar Paimda Khan Barakhzai.

While Afghanistan suffered from symptoms of chronic anarchy, the British Indian Government got a respite from the danger of the north-west. The Indian states, one after the other, were being absorbed in the British Empire and even the small Sikh States to the East of Lahore came under British protection. This brought the British Government in direct contact with Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Moreover, the British found themselves comparatively safe after their treaties with Lahore, Sindh and Persia.

The British, however, never remained totally inactive in these regions and preserved their contacts through non-committal diplomacy. The obvious reason for British inactivity can be ascribed to the non-existence of any European power to challenge their Indian Empire. In order to keep themselves in close touch with the movements in these states, the British were always ready to enlarge the scope of their treaties, mainly those which they had contracted with Ranjit Singh and the Court of Persia. These treaties influenced the Anglo-Afghan relations in the 1830s.

After the Treaty of Lahore, the Sikh states between the Jamuna and the Sutlej came under British protection.<sup>2</sup> Captain Wade was of the opinion that "it was not in the nature of Ranjit Singh to remain in peace. There was nothing in the settlement with the British which was against his desire for expansion westward."<sup>3</sup> In February-April 1810, Ranjit Singh failed in his attempt to annex Multan to his dominion.<sup>4</sup> He, therefore, proposed to Sir David Ochterlony that the two allied powers, the British and the Sikhs, should march against Multan and divide their conquests equally;<sup>5</sup> but the British declined to have anything to do with his expansionist policy.<sup>6</sup>

The influence of Ranjit Singh's power was being felt on all sides of his kingdom and his policy seems to have

<sup>2</sup>Foreign Miscel., No. 206, p. 79.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>4</sup>Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

<sup>5</sup>Ochterlony to Government, 10 December 1809,

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 30 December 1809.

been based upon exciting and bringing to the surface, as much as possible, the unfriendly feelings of one neighbour against another.<sup>7</sup> The French had schooled him in European policies and politics. He was, therefore, for some time, inclined to be suspicious of the British professions; but, later on, was converted into being the most trusted ally of the British on the Indian soil.<sup>8</sup>

### (i) Afghan-Sikh Relations

In Afghanistan, Shah Mahmud, was able to defeat Shah Shuja with the help of Fateh Khan Barakhzai. The first desire that impelled Fateh Khan was to subdue Kashmir, which was then ruled by a protege of Shah Shuja. When Fateh Khan was able to overcome the internal difficulties in Afghanistan, he began to turn his eyes towards Ranjit Singh. While Ranjit Singh's forces were engaged in the Indus Valley, an envoy arrived from Fateh Khan for the purpose of obtaining Ranjit Singh's assistance for the recovery of Kashmir from Ata Mohammad Khan, the rebellious *nazim* (Administrator) of that province.<sup>9</sup> The *vizier* of Kabul had a conference with the Sikh chief, which ended in the Maharaja's agreement, who demanded in return a portion of the revenue of Kashmir. Fateh Khan preferred giving a *nazranah* of nine lakhs of rupees and his offer was accepted by the Sikh chief.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, Dewan Mohkem Chand, a trusted general of Ranjit Singh, was commissioned to assist the *vizier*, while the Maharaja himself retired to Lahore.<sup>11</sup>

When the allied Sikh and Afghan forces approached Kashmir, the *nazim* of the place, who had imprisoned Shah Shuja, fled away, leaving the *vizier* and the *dewan*

<sup>7</sup>Alexander Burnes, *India and Russia*, For. Miscel., No. 305.

<sup>8</sup>But Burnes' own estimate of Ranjit Singh was somewhat more objective and different from his Government's total reliance on the professions of the Maharaja: 'Nothing is more improbable than a violation of friendship on his part but he is only an ally from the motives of self-interest.' *Ibid*.

<sup>9</sup>Mohan Lal. *op. cit.*, I, pp. 84-87.

<sup>10</sup>Foreign Miscel., No. 206, p. 95.

<sup>11</sup>Foreign Miscel., No. 206, p. 96.

in its full control.<sup>12</sup> Upon hearing of the defeat of Ata Mohammad, his brother, Jehandad Khan, who was deputising for the *nazim*, realized the hopelessness of any bid on his part to hold the fort of Attock, and thought it best to surrender it to the Sikhs and to seek the Maharaja's protection.<sup>13</sup> He made over the fort to Fakir Aziz Uddin, the most trusted adviser of Ranjit Singh, who was specially sent to take its charge. Thus possessed of the fort of Attock, Ranjit Singh obtained an ascendancy over the Afghans which he continued to enjoy till his death. Fateh Khan viewed these transactions as an infraction of the treaty, and refused to pay the stipulated sum until the fort of Attock was restituted to the Afghan king. This led to the dissolution of the friendship which had been contracted between the parties, and the Dewan returned to Lahore.<sup>14</sup> This breach of faith on the part of Fateh Khan marks the beginning of Sikh-Afghan rivalry and enmity which lasted throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

To widen the breach between the then rulers of Afghanistan and the Sikhs, Shah Shujaul Mulk, who had regained his freedom, after the escape of Ata Mohammad Khan, preferred to commit himself to the care of Dewan Mohkem Chand and accompanied him to Lahore to join the members of his family, who had, for reasons of safety, taken up residence there during this unsettled period of their life.<sup>16</sup> The step thus taken by Shah Shuja was a denial of the offer of protection extended to him by Fateh Khan. And as events shaped themselves later on, it had much rather not been taken, for it involved Shah Shuja in great persecution at the hands of the Sikhs.<sup>17</sup> Yet, he had been so often made the sport of the perfidy of fortune, that had he lent an attentive ear to the counsel given by Fateh Khan, he would probably have become the dupe of the same treachery

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<sup>12</sup>*Rooznamcha-i-Shah Shuja*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>13</sup>*Rishtia, op. cit.* p. 23.

<sup>14</sup>*Rooznamcha, op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>15</sup>*Ferrier, op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>16</sup>*Kaye, op. cit.*, I, p. 95; also *Rooznamcha, op. cit.*, pp. 89-92.

<sup>17</sup>*Rooznamcha, op. cit.*, p. 98; and *Rishtia, op. cit.*, P. 23.



as he had already been subjected to by Ata Mohammad Khan, the exiled Governor of Kashmir, and might in the end have found himself exposed to even greater distress than that which he had to endure from his misplaced confidence in the generosity of Ranjit Singh.

The Shah had no sooner arrived in Ranjit Singh's court than the Maharaja demanded of him the celebrated diamond, *Kohinoor*, which the Sikh learnt, was in the possession of Shah Shuja.<sup>18</sup> At first Shah Shuja refused to surrender it, which so enraged Ranjit Singh that he deprived him of all comforts and planted a secret guard with drawn swords over his person.<sup>19</sup> Driven to the last extremity, the unhappy exile parted with the diamond, receiving in return a promise of the payment of a sum of Rs 150,000 which was partly paid, and a grant of the districts of Kotkamalia and Jhengh, and a further promise of enough money and men to help him regain his kingdom.<sup>20</sup> The Maharaja's rapacity was not, however, to be easily satiated. He learnt that the Shah still retained some rare jewels of great worth, and he again succeeded in extorting them from the unhappy Shah Shuja.<sup>21</sup>

Discovering too late that neither honour nor repose were to be had in the territory of Ranjit Singh, Shah Shuja desired leave to depart. Representations were made to the Maharaja that, if permitted to escape, Shah Shuja might succeed in exciting incalculable disturbances. It was also suspected that he was conspiring to recover Kashmir and these dual considerations induced Ranjit Singh to remove the Shah to a strictly guarded house where he was closely watched even in his bed room. After remaining in that state of captivity for about a year he contrived by a deep-laid stratagem to elude the vigilance of his jailors, and having

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<sup>18</sup>For. Miscel., No. 206. That famous jewel valued at several lakhs of rupees, at that time, fell, at the death of Nadir Shah (who had taken it away from Mohammad Shah, the Mughal Emperor of Delhi in 1739), in the hands of Ahmad Shah Abdali, from whom it descended to his grandson Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk.

<sup>19</sup>For. Miscel., No. 206, p. 99.

<sup>20</sup>*Rooznamcha*, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-99; For. Miscel., No. 206, p. 99.

<sup>21</sup>For Miscel., No. 206, p. 100; and *Rooznamcha*, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

secretly sent the members of his family and retinue to Ludhiana, he made his escape to Kistawar <sup>22</sup>, whose chief extended to him a most gracious and hospitable reception and an offer of assistance for the conquest of Kashmir.<sup>23</sup> A force was raised for the purpose and the Shah proceeded towards that country but fortune was unfavourable to his designs. On the road he was caught in a heavy fall of snow in which many of his companions perished and his army dispersed.<sup>24</sup>

It was in the month of September 1816 that Shuja joined his family at Ludhiana. He had sought a resting place and ultimately found it. The Shah gratefully acknowledged the friendly hospitality of the British but the burden of a life of inactivity could hardly be endured by him. The Durrani Empire was still rent by internecine convulsions. Azim Khan, one of the Barakhzai chiefs invited Shah Shuja to reassert his claim to the throne; and the Shah weary of repose and untaught by past experience, flung himself into a new enterprise only to add another to his already long list of failures, which it took nearly a quarter of a century more to render complete.<sup>25</sup>

It might be recalled here that when Fateh Khan, in collaboration with Dewan Mohkem Chand took Kashmir, he had left Azim Khan, his own brother, to govern there. Returning from Kashmir (1813-14) Fateh Khan wanted to take back Attock. Therefore, he marched on it with a strong force to relieve it of Sikh control. Ranjit Singh sent Mohkem Chand to check Fateh Khan. In a pitched battle the Afghans were completely routed,<sup>26</sup> and the Maharaja earned his first important victory over the Afghans.

In 1815, the Maharaja unsuccessfully attempted the conquest of Kashmir with the help of one Azger Khan of Bajour tribe and narrowly escaped capture. In the same year Ranjit Singh demanded a sum of Rs 80,000 a year from

<sup>22</sup>Jammu.

<sup>23</sup>For Miscel., Nos. 206, p.101 and No. 305.

<sup>24</sup>*Rooznamcha*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>25</sup>Kaye, *op. cit.*, I, p. 103.

<sup>26</sup>For Miscel. No. 206, p. 103,

the Nawab of Bahawalpur to the accompaniment of threats to the latter's territories and obtained unwilling compliance of his behest.<sup>27</sup> In the year 1818, Ranjit Singh was able to annex Multan to his dominions with much difficulty on account of the stiff resistance put up by the Afghans<sup>28</sup>.

We may now turn our attention towards Herat, the granary of Central Asia, which was strategically the most vulnerable and hence the most vital area from the point of view of the future development of Afghanistan's relations with the British in India. Haji Firuz had ruled Herat practically as an independent prince for about sixteen years. In 1805 he had made an unsuccessful attempt on the Persian frontier of Ghorian, and, being defeated and pursued by a Persian force, had agreed to pay a tribute to the Shah of Persia. Again, some years later, he had put off a Persian force by the payment of a sum of money and making a promise that coinage should be struck in the name of Fateh Ali Shah<sup>29</sup>.

In 1816, Khurasan had been reconquered by the Persians and a powerful army was ready to advance on Herat. In despair Haji Firuz applied to Kabul for assistance, although he had neglected to pay the stipulated tribute to Shah Mahmud. In response to this call, Fateh Khan marched quickly to Herat at the head of a strong force. Entering the city he won over the garrison and sent Haji Firuz under escort to Kabul. Dost Mohammad Khan with a party of his men then allegedly violated the *harem* of the ex-ruler, stripping the princesses, one of whom was the sister of Shah Mahmud of their jewellery and even of their clothes. This incident was used by Prince Kamran, son of Shah Mahmud, as a pretext for the blinding of Fateh Khan which culminated in his death<sup>30</sup>. Having occupied Herat and

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<sup>27</sup>For. Miscel. 206, p. 121.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>Sykes, *Afghanistan, op. cit.*, I, p. 390

<sup>30</sup>Shah Shuja in his *Rooznamcha* is of the opinion that because Fateh Khan grew ambitious and determined to take into his own hands the reins of government, for the purpose resolved to ensnare Prince Kamran, who hearing of the plot seized Fateh Khan, put

taken over the command of its garrison, the Afghan *vizier* attacked the powerful Persian army at Kafir Kala. The issue was hotly contested. But the Persians retired after sustaining heavy losses in men, material and money.<sup>31</sup> Fateh Khan hoped to be rewarded for this exploit, but as soon as he reached Kabul, he was besieged by Kamran's men, blinded and subsequently slain<sup>32</sup>. But Fateh Khan left behind innumerable Barakhzais to take his revenge. Mahmud and Kamran were fortunate to retire to Herat. But the Sadozai dynasty of Ahmad Shah fell to pieces by 1818.<sup>33</sup>

Azim Khan, the Barakhzai Governor of Kashmir, went to Kabul to meddle in its affairs. Kashmir being left undefended, the Sikhs took advantage of the opportunity and seized it. Not only that, the Sikh army crossed the Indus to occupy Peshawar. For sometime they were successful, but had to give way before the hostile population and had to appoint Sultan Mohammad Khan Barakhzai as their vassal Governor of Peshwar.<sup>34</sup>

In 1821, the Sikh army commissioned to levy the annual taxes, were severely beaten back by the Afghan hordes. And Ranjit Singh retired to his capital after one of the most unlucky and damaging expeditions that he ever led. The Sikhs admitted the defeat which they sustained at the hands of the Afghans, whose fearless bravery they generously acknowledged.<sup>35</sup>

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out his eyes with the point of a sharp dagger, p. 140.; Qasim Rishtia disproved the charge against Fateh Khan of violating the *harem* (Household) of Haji Feruz and attributes the act of Kamran Mirza to jealousy, *Afghanistan-dar-qarn-e-nuzdah*, p. 28.

<sup>31</sup>Shirazi, *Tarikh-e-Ahmad Shah Durrani*, p.141., cited in Rishtia, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>32</sup>Rishtia, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>33</sup>The blinding of Painda Khan by Zaman Shah and the blinding and putting to death of Fateh Khan by Kamran Mirza, broadened the breach between Sadozais and Barakhzais. The hostility of Barakhzais precipitated the fall of Sadozais and the rise of Dost Mohammad, the Barakhzai, *youngest* son of Painda Khan and *youngest* brother of Fateh Khan.

<sup>34</sup>For. Miscel., No. 305.

<sup>35</sup>For. Miscel., No. 206, p. 144.

On the disintegration of the Sadozai dynasty in 1818, the state of their possessions may be summed as follows: Balkh in the north asserted her independence, as did Baluchistan and Sindh in the south. In the east, Ranjit Singh had wrested the Punjab, and Kashmir; while he exercised suzerainty over Peshawar whose ruler Sultan Mohammad Khan, one of the Barakhzai brothers, used to pay him tribute.<sup>36</sup>

After the death of Fateh Khan, his next brother, Azim Khan Barakhzai emerged as the most powerful man of Afghanistan.<sup>37</sup> But Dost Mohammad Khan had no inclination to obey and support him. When Azim Khan led the combined forces of all the Barakhzai chiefs to challenge the might of Ranjit Singh, the Maharaja well knew the manner in which to deal with Afghans which was different from the conventional one of meeting them on the battlefield. The Sikh chief, therefore, sent messengers to the Afghan camps and won over the Barakhzai brothers with the promise of bribe. Dost Mohammad Khan was one of the bribe-stricken Barakhzais. Azim Khan had reposed great confidence in Dost Mohammad Khan and never expected such treachery from him. The perfidy of his own men broke the heart of Azim Khan who shortly afterwards died in 1823.<sup>38</sup>

In fact, from that time the rule of Barakhzais in Afghanistan began. Mohammad Azim Khan in Kabul, Yar Mohammad Khan in Peshawar, Jabbar Khan in Kashmir, Dil-brothers in Kandahar and Nawab Zaman Khan in Derajat took the reign of power in their hands. Shah Ayoob, though the *de juri* king of Kabul, had no authority in the presence of Azim Khan. Only Herat was in the possession of Shah Mahmud and his son Kamran, where the Barakhzais had no control. But truly speaking, none of the rulers were stable in their palaces and were jealous of each other. They were not even united to dispel any foreign

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<sup>36</sup>For. Miscel., No. 305.

<sup>37</sup>Vide Rishtia, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 41.



encroachment if ever it would have occurred. The result was that, by and by, Ranjit Singh took control over Kashmir, Multan, Peshawar, and Derajat, and the other rulers did not come to support the victims of the Sikh encroachments.

There is no doubt that after Fateh Khan, Sirdar Mohammad Azim Khan was the ablest statesman of the Barakhzais. His non-reliance upon others was the main cause of his failure. So he had to see Ranjit Singh's dominions extended upto Peshawar and Khyber. Moreover, he did not choose the ablest among the Barakhzais, Dost Mohammad Khan, as his successor. This led to confusion and anarchy after him. Azim Khan could not effect any change in the affairs of Afghanistan and left it in a state of anarchy in which he had found it. Thus the field was left open for Dost Mohammad's energetic activities.

#### **(ii) Anglo-Russian Diplomacy in Persia**

A survey may now be made of the British diplomatic achievements in checkmating the influence of the European powers at the court of Tehran.

For some time, the Anglo-Persian relations were being developed through the exchange of ambassadors. In 1809-10, Fateh Ali Shah of Persia despatched Haji Mirza Abdul Hasan Khan to London. His special assignment was to ascertain clearly the manner in which Persia could receive the subsidy under the treaty engagements.

The treaty negotiated by Sir Harford Jones was duly ratified in England and its negotiator was confirmed in his appointment at Tehran. The Home Government eventually decided to retain permanent control of diplomatic relations with Persia. Sir H. Jones was succeeded in 1811 by Sir Gore Ouseley, assisted by Major D'Arcy Todd.<sup>39</sup>

In the meantime, Persia fought a war with Russia, to take back Georgia, which had been taken by Russia in 1801. In the beginning, the Persian army won a measure of success but later on suffered complete defeat at the hands of the Russian army in 1812. Peace was restored between the

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<sup>39</sup>Sykes, *Persia*, II, p. 309.

two countries by the treaty of Gulistan. At this juncture the British Government had friendly relations with Russia and in consequence was unwilling to honour the treaties concluded with Persia to help her against Russia. Gore Ouseley, however, used his good offices in promoting negotiations for a treaty between Russia and Persia and this treaty was concluded on October 12, 1813. Its terms were disastrous for Persia. She had to cede Georgia, Derbent, Baku, Sherwan, Shaki, Genja, Karabagh and part of Talish to Russia, and also agreed indirectly to maintain no navy on the Caspian Sea. Russia, in return, apparently undertook to support Abbas Mirza in securing his succession to the throne of Persia. Thus for his personal ends the heir-apparent made over to Russia the territories most coveted by her.<sup>40</sup>

Russia, due to the invasion of Napoleon, was in no position just then, to press her territorial demands upon Persia and might well have been satisfied with lesser concessions, at any rate, for the time being. Persia, on her side entertained hopes of strengthening her position with the help of British officers and then to try her fortune in war. In other words the peace concluded between Russia and Persia was meant only to be a precarious interval before the final arbitrament of war.<sup>41</sup>

Shortly after the conclusion of the treaty of Gulistan, Sir Gore Ouseley negotiated with Persia the final treaty based on the preliminary agreement made by Sir Harford Jones. A year later, Henry Ellis and James Morier were able to conclude the final definite treaty on November 25, 1814.<sup>42</sup> By the terms of this treaty, which was specifically intended to be a defensive one, all alliances previously entered into between Persia and the European nations hostile to Great Britain were null and void, and all European armies hostile to Great Britain were to be prevented from entering Persia. The Shah was furthermore bound to induce the rulers of

<sup>40</sup>See for details: Sykes, *Persia*, II, pp. 311-314; and Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-35.

<sup>41</sup>Sykes, *Persia*, II, p. 314.

<sup>42</sup>See Appendix VI (a)

Khwarzm, Tataristan, Bokhara and Samarkand to oppose any army which might seek passage through their territories with a view to the invasion of India.<sup>43</sup> This provision was stipulated in view of and in consonance with the realization of the growing Russian menace to the British Indian Empire. The British had come to view any spontaneous act of Russian aggression upon Persia as a demonstration against India.<sup>44</sup> The treaty also contained provision for mutual assistance which had to be rendered in case of aggression—aggression defined as an attack upon the territories of another state. The definition of aggression was necessary because Britain had also undertaken to give Persia a huge subsidy, in case of war, which was not to be stopped until Persia herself was involved in an act of aggression. The subsidy was, however, to be spent under the supervision of the British Ministers.<sup>45</sup> Britain also promised to exercise her influence in the delimitation of Persia's boundary with Russia. By another provision of the treaty, the British Government was not to interfere in case of war breaking out between Persia and Afghanistan, whereas Persia, on her part, agreed to attack Afghanistan if she went to war with Great Britain.<sup>46</sup>

It is easy to criticise the various details of the treaty, as for instance the clause by which Great Britain was bound to interfere in boundary disputes between Persia and Russia, or again the proposition that the Shah could influence the ruler of Tataristan to oppose an invading army, betrayed much ignorance of political geography. The document must be taken as a whole in order to be judged fairly. We must bear in mind the keen solicitude evinced by the French to win over the court of Persia, as also the existence of a French peril, even though it then exercised the minds of men in a much larger measure than reality justified. We must also not forget that there had existed an Afghan peril to British India. Taking everything into

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<sup>43</sup>Sykes, *Persia*, II, p. 309.

<sup>44</sup>Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>45</sup>See Appendix VI (a)

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

consideration we cannot but concede that the treaty dealt with these important questions in a rather adequate manner.<sup>47</sup> The only criticism which one would venture to offer is that it does not appear to have been sufficiently recognized that in case of a war between the Afghans and the British, if Persia in accordance with the terms of the treaty attacked Afghanistan, the British were likely to view such Persian intervention as backed by Russia, and constituting a threat to India.

In order to fulfil the obligations of the treaty concluded with Persia and make that country an effective barrier against any European invasion of their Indian Empire, the British military Generals trained the Persians in the use of British arms and ammunitions, and paid the subsidy punctually to the Persian Government.<sup>48</sup> The British were, however, hardly able to accomplish the task which they had undertaken under the terms of the treaty; when Persia again came into collision with Russia in 1826, her means and power as a military nation were positively inferior to those which she possessed at the close of her former struggle in 1813.<sup>49</sup>

From the convention of Gulistan (1813) upto the year 1826, there was at least an outward observance of peace between Russia and Persia. The peace, however, was a hollow one destined soon to be broken. The irritation of a disputed boundary had, ever since the ratification of the treaty of Gulistan, kept the two nations in a state of suspended animosity. In Georgia, there had been frightful misrule. The Persian *maulvees* incited the Georgians, who massacred the Russian garrison and war broke out between the two countries.<sup>50</sup> The Persians were completely beaten. The intervention of Great Britain was gladly accepted and Persia submitted to the terms of a humiliating peace.

In February 1828 at Turkomanchi, the treaty was signed. By the terms of the treaty, Russia extended her

<sup>47</sup>Sykes, *Persia*, II, p. 310.

<sup>48</sup>Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>49</sup>Kaye, *op. cit.*, I, p. 142.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid*, p. 143.

boundary very much to the East, and got an indemnity of millions of roubles. But the most important privilege which Russia was given was the sole right of navigation in the Caspian Sea. For Russia the advantages under the treaty were professedly moderate, while for Persia the disadvantages were entirely humiliating.<sup>51</sup> and it has been remarked that under this treaty Persia was 'delivered, bound hand and foot, to the court of St. Petersburg.'<sup>52</sup> How far the British Government was bound to assist Persia in the war of 1826-27 remained an open question. The Treaty of Tehran committed Great Britain, in the event of a war between Persia and any European state, either to send an army from India to assist the Shah, or to grant an annual subsidy of 200,000 Tomans during the continuance of the war; but the stipulation was subject to the condition that the war was to be one which was in no way provoked by an act of Persian aggression.<sup>53</sup> The Persian Government maintained that the unjust and the violent occupation of Gokchah by a Russian force furnished her with a legitimate *casus belli*; but the Russians put forward counter charges. The truth, however, was that the war had been provoked by the Russian desire of expansion. The inaction of Britain at this juncture arose out of considerations of dubious expediency. The British envoy, with his strange interpretation of the Russo-Persian war, judged Persia as an aggressor within the meaning of the Anglo-Persian Treaty of 1814, by which the British were committed to come to the help of Persia if the latter was not an aggressor. While the British eased out of their obligation of helping Persia, the Russians surmised that Persia was emboldened to embark upon this aggressive adventure by the clandestine promises of the British. If Britain had adopted a firmer attitude, Russia would not have cared to ride roughshod over Persia in the manner she did. The unscrupulousness of Russia placed Britain at a disadvantage. The game was one in which the more

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<sup>51</sup>Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup>McNeill, Sir J., *Progress and Present Position of Russia in the East* p. 98.

<sup>53</sup>Kaye, *op. cit.*, I, p. 147.



honourable player was sure to be foully beaten. Russia made new acquisitions at the cost of Persia, and Britain looked idly on.<sup>54</sup>

The Persian claims arising out of the treaty awakened the British diplomats to a reconsideration of the subsidy articles which had involved them into difficulty and embarrassment not unrelated to a tendency to bring them into disrepute. The Persians were very perplexed over the demand of indemnity by Russia. At this conjuncture, Britain, like an expert money-lender, was ready to take advantage of the embarrassments of the Persian state and to make its own terms with the 'impoverished debtor of the unyielding Muscovite.'<sup>55</sup> The bargain was struck. Sir John Macdonald, on behalf of the British Government, passed a bond to the Shah for 250,000 Tomans as the price of the amendment of the subsidy articles and subsequently obtained the required erasures,<sup>56</sup> by the payment of four-fifths of the amount. Thus, the British freed themselves from the embarrassing commitment of helping Persia in her war with Russia.

The British Government's withdrawal from her commitment to Persia was partly due to the change in their understanding that the Russian encroachments on Persian territory did not envisage any threat to their Indian Empire; and partly, by keeping Russia friendly, the British Government wanted her backing and support in European diplomacy. While the Russians pursued, after the Treaty of Turkomanchi, a policy of reducing Persia to a state of growing subordination without making further acquisitions of her territory and taking greater advantage of her raw materials. And following these developments the British influence at Tehran considerably declined. Little pains were taken to preserve it until it became apparent that the encroachments of Persia upon the countries between her frontiers and India, instigated as they were by the Russian Government, were calculated to threaten the security of the British Empire.

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<sup>54</sup>*Ibid*, p. 148

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid*, p. 149.

<sup>56</sup>See Appendix VI (b)

The year 1828, in which the Treaty of Turkomanchi was signed, was disagreeably eventful for Persia. By the terms of that instrument the third instalment of the indemnity had to be handed over to the Russian representative on August 27, failing which that power had the right to annex Azerbaijan. With characteristic Persian levity, no arrangements were made for the payment of this money, and but for the friendly vigilance of the British Envoy it would not have been forthcoming.<sup>57</sup>

In the autumn, a special mission from the Tsar under M. Grebaidov reached Tehran. It was received with much distinction and honour but the envoy's claim that two Armenian women in the possession of the Persian *Vizier* should be given up created much ill feeling. The women were surrendered, but the decision of the chief *Mujtahid* that it was lawful to rescue them from the hands of the infidels touched off a riot. The bazaars were closed, a mob stormed the Russian legation, and the envoy and his staff were murdered. The Shah, in utter dismay, despatched his grandson Khusro Mirza to offer the apologies of the Persian Government at the Russian Court and to express his horror at the outrage. Russia was engaged at the time in hostilities with Turkey and was unwilling to drive Persia into the arms of that power by any act of harshness. Consequently, not only were the demands of Russia limited to the exile of the chief *Mujtahid* and the punishment of the guilty individuals, but Tsar Nicholas also generously remitted a crore of Toman of the war indemnity.<sup>58</sup>

### (iii) Dost Mohammad, Ranjit Singh and the British

Leaving Persia for a while, let us turn to Amir Dost Mohammad Khan's relations with Maharaja Ranjit Singh that were to become one of the major causes of the First Afghan War.

It was only in 1826 that Dost Mohammad succeeded in getting himself recognized as the acknowledged ruler of

<sup>57</sup>Sykes, *Persia*, II, p. 321.

<sup>58</sup>Terentyff, *op. cit.*, II, p. 26.

Kabul, Gazni and Jalalabad. In that year he also subdued Sultan Mohammad Khan of Peshawar.<sup>59</sup> While, by 1823 Ranjit Singh had become the master of the Punjab almost unheeded by the British, they had occasion to review and revise their attitude towards him from the time they asked his aid against the armies of Napoleon. The British were also trying to capture the commerce of the Indus via Karachi in which Ranjit Singh's cooperation was required. In 1824, the Sikhs exercised a measure of precarious authority over Peshawar. Some time later the Afghans defeated the forces of the Sikh General, Hari Singh. However, when the Maharaja appeared in person at Peshawar, the Barakhzai, Yar Mohammad renewed protestations of his allegiance to the Sikh chief.<sup>60</sup>

About 1828-29, when Dost Mohammad had established his authority in Kabul and Gazni, a formidable insurrection broke out against the Sikhs in Peshawar under Syed Ahmad Shaheed.<sup>61</sup> It was known as the Wahabee movement. Ahmad Shaheed was a reputed figure of northern India of his time. His followers were spread all over the country to agitate for the unhindered right of the Muslims to worship and preach their religion. As this, the Syed considered, was not granted by the Sikhs in the Punjab, he launched a movement against their rule.<sup>62</sup> Syed Ahmad came from Uttar Pradesh, where he gathered a large following known as *Ghazis*, to fight the Sikhs. There is no evidence that the British Government took any measures to check the recruitment of *Ghazis* in their territory against their ally, Ranjit Singh. On the other hand it is suspected that the British Government had lent countenance to this movement.<sup>63</sup> The most remarkable achievement of the Wahabees under Syed Ahmad was the capture of Peshawar in 1830. It is interesting to note that the Barakhzai rulers of Peshawar

<sup>59</sup>For. Miscel., No. 207.

<sup>60</sup>Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>62</sup>Jafar Thaneshwari, *Swanesh-e-Ahmadi*, p. 96; *Al-Furqan*. Ismail Shaheed Number; also see For. Miscel. No. 206, pp. 184-6.

<sup>63</sup>*Al-Furqan*, 'Ismail Shaheed Number.'

were opposed to this movement and the Wahabees occupied Peshawar against Sultan Mohammad Khan and Yar Mohammad Khan. When the news of the capture of Peshawar reached Lahore, an army was despatched by Ranjit Singh to give fight to the Wahabees. By the time this reinforcement arrived Sultan Mohammad had come to terms with Syed Ahmad and was reinstated as the administrator of Peshawar.<sup>64</sup> The movement of *Ghazis* continued to spread to the tribal areas and they were exciting the Muslims to rise against the Sikhs. Sher Singh, the Sikh Governor of Kashmir, took the *Ghazis* by surprise and in the battle of Balakot Syed Ahmad Shaheed and his devout followers were routed and killed. The followers of Syed Ahmad still consider that it was due to the treachery of the Afghans that Shaheed's mission remained incomplete.<sup>65</sup>

The Wahabee interlude, while it kept the Sikhs occupied, provided freedom and opportunity to Dost Mohammad Khan to consolidate and expand his rule in Afghanistan.<sup>66</sup> The movement, by keeping the Sikhs engaged, checked Ranjit Singh in his designs of expansion towards Sindh.<sup>67</sup> The end of Syed Ahmad Shaheed, whose activities had for a few years engaged the attention of the Sikhs and the Afghans and kept them apart, brought them once more into direct and unpleasant contact with each other. The intrigues of Shah Shuja and the desire of the British Government for the navigation of Indus, brought Afghans in direct touch with the British, who were becoming apprehensive of the Russian designs in Central Asia.

During a meeting between the Governor General, Lord William Bentinck and Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Rupur on January 17, 1831<sup>68</sup>, a written assurance of perpetual friendship and alliance was received by the Sikh Chief

<sup>64</sup>For. Miscel. No. 206.

<sup>65</sup>See Chap. IV. of T. A. Nizami's *Muslim Political Thought and Activity*, Aligarh, 1969.

<sup>66</sup>Rishtia, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>67</sup>Khera, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>68</sup>Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

from the British Government. The Maharaja, however, remained apprehensive of the British proposal for opening the Indus to navigation.<sup>69</sup> In 1832, when the Maharaja was prevented from extending his influence over the Sindh state of Shikarpur because of British opposition, his apprehensions, were more than confirmed that the promotion of British commercial interests through the navigation of the Indus was a hindrance to his policy of southward expansions.<sup>70</sup>

The relations of the British with the rulers of the Indus valley were destined to get more complicated on account of the revived hopes of Shah Shuja.<sup>71</sup> In 1827 he disclosed his ambitions to the British Government and was told that he was welcome to endeavour to recover his kingdoms with the aid of Ranjit Singh or of the Sindhians.<sup>72</sup> The Maharaja of Lahore expressed repentance to Shah Shuja for his past conduct and signified readiness to help him with money and arms.<sup>73</sup> In 1832, Shah Shuja felt encouraged upon receipt of the rumour of impending Persian invasion of Afghanistan. Ranjit Singh's promise of help was not devoid of self-interest and under the pretence of supporting Shah Shuja, he desired to gain ascendancy over Sindh. It appears that officially the British Government remained indifferent to Shah Shuja's overtures.<sup>74</sup> The Shah could not come to any satisfactory terms with Ranjit Singh, but, as it was essential to secure Sikh neutrality, especially with regard to Shikarpur, he entered into a treaty of alliance with Ranjit Singh by which the districts beyond the Indus, and in the possession of Sikhs, were formally ceded to the Maharaja.<sup>75</sup> The British had also become less averse to Shah Shuja's proposed attempt, and he was assured that his

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<sup>69</sup>Murray, *Ranjit Singh*, p. 166.

<sup>70</sup>Cunningham *op. cit.*, p. 174.

<sup>71</sup>*Rooznamcha*, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

<sup>72</sup>Resident at Delhi to, Capt. Wade, 25 July 1827.

<sup>73</sup>*Rooznamcha*, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>74</sup>*Tarikh-e-Afghanistan*, p. 131.

<sup>75</sup>For. Miscel., No. 337: Geographical Memoire to Papers respecting Afghanistan and Persia, 1839.



annual stipend would be continued to his family, and no warning was repeated to him against returning.<sup>76</sup>

Dost Mohammad received the news of Shuja's overtures with alarm. He conveyed a warning to the Amirs of Sindh against helping Shah Shuja; and addressed the British Indian Governor General for help against the Sikh encroachments on Peshawar. After pledging friendship to the British, he requested for the extension of the facilities for trade between his country and India.<sup>77</sup>

However, in June 1833, Shuja set out on his campaigns after his army had been put into some shape by Captain Wade at Ludhiana. Shuja had succeeded in winning over Captain Wade, the British Political Agent, to his plans. With the Agent's consent, the Shah promised Ranjit Singh to forego his rights on Peshawar and adjacent districts in return for the latter's help.<sup>78</sup> Ranjit Singh did not, however, ratify the treaty because he was apprehensive that Shuja, after becoming powerful in Kabul, might try to recover Peshawar.<sup>79</sup>

The funds for the expedition were provided partly by William Bentinck's permission for the advance payment of Shah Shuja's pension and partly from the sum of Rs one lakh paid by Ranjit Singh.<sup>80</sup> Such an act on the part of the Governor General went a long way to encourage Shah Shuja, both materially and morally, to undertake the invasion of Afghanistan to recover his throne; but it earned for the British Government the charge of active interference in the affairs of Afghanistan and of planning the overthrow of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan.

Reaching Sindh, Shuja demanded a heavy subsidy from the Amirs, who on their refusal, were defeated in a battle. Thus Shuja was enabled to replenish his military

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<sup>76</sup>Govt. to Capt. Wade, 19 December 1832.

<sup>77</sup>Mohan Lal, *Life of Dost Mohammad Khan*, I, pp. 249-250: Text of Letter of Dost Mohammad.

<sup>78</sup>Vide For. Miscel., No. 336: Geographical Memoire to Papers respecting Afghanistan and Persia. 1839.

<sup>79</sup>Sykes, *Afghanistan*, I, pp. 394-395.

<sup>80</sup>*Rooznamcha, op. cit.*, p. 177.

chest with a sum of Rupees five lakhs.<sup>81</sup> At the outset, Shuja was successful in his campaign at Kandahar but Dost Mohammad Khan came to the rescue of his 'Dil' brothers and won the day. Shuja had to retrace his steps; and after prolonged wandering returned with a large sum of money to his asylum at Ludhiana. While Dost Mohammad's success at Kandahar further strengthened his position not only in Kabul but also earned him a name as a strong and effective ruler in Afghanistan.

The correspondence of Shah Shuja, captured by Dost Mohammad Khan revealed the web of intrigues which Shah Shuja, supported by Captain Wade, had woven, and proved to the victor not only that many of his own chiefs had been disloyal to him but also what was of far greater importance, that the expedition had been countenanced by the representatives of the British Government.<sup>82</sup> Had the Governor-General firmly advised against the expedition, coupled with a refusal to subsidize it, he would have saved much bloodshed in Sindh and Afghanistan and would not have provided justification for Dost Mohammad's distrust of the British Government with all its tragic consequences.

Ranjit Singh, on his part, was apprehensive that Shah Shuja might not honour his treaty commitments. He, therefore resolved to guard against the possible consequences of the ex-King's probable success and seized Peshawar before his tributaries could transfer their allegiance to Kabul.<sup>83</sup> This was in all probability an excuse. The real aim behind Ranjit Singh's countenance to Shuja's Kandahar adventure was that it would engage Dost Mohammad Khan in that direction and leave the Maharaja free to annex Peshawar. That was what precisely happened.

As far as the rulers of Afghanistan were concerned, it

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<sup>81</sup>Wade, For. Miscel., No. 206.

<sup>82</sup>Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, I, p. 162; Two letters of Wade to Macnaughten dated May 11 & 12, 1832 (in For. Miscel., No. 308), support Dost Mohammad's contention.

<sup>83</sup>Capt. Wade to Govt., 17 June 1834.

might well have been expected that the victory gained by Dost Mohammad who had rescued his brothers at Kandahar from disaster, would bury deep the family feuds. This, however, did not happen.<sup>84</sup> While Dost Mohammad had been engaged in hostilities with Shah Shuja, Ranjit Singh occupied Peshawar and drove away Sultan Mohammad and his brothers, who retired to Jalalabad. In the absence of Dost Mohammad Khan, Sultan Mohammad and his brothers decided to make an attempt to capture Kabul, but speedily abandoned it upon hearing the result of the battle of Kandahar. Indeed they visited Dost Mohammad to congratulate him on his victory. The Amir was not deceived, but still sent a body of 9,000 cavalry to attack the Sikhs under their command. Since little success attended their efforts, Dost Mohammad went to the front himself.<sup>85</sup> The Maharaja, unwilling to fight the experienced Amir, sent negotiators including Harlan, an American adventurer to his camp, ostensibly to treat with the Amir but actually to bribe his sirdars.<sup>86</sup> So successful were the Maharaja's efforts, seconded by the hostile brothers of Dost Mohammad that the Amir's army melted away and he had to retire hastily to Kabul losing his prestige as well as his camp equipment.<sup>87</sup> Sultan Mohammad was rewarded for his services to the Maharaja, with his appointment as Governor of the fortress of Rohtas, while Dost Mohammad appealed for help to the British rulers once more. The Persians, on the other hand, were corresponding with Dost Mohammad at this time, holding out promises of help against the British and the Sikh encroachments.<sup>88</sup>

To the British Indian Government it did not appear to be the proper time to participate actively in the affairs of the warring north-western states. They seem to have been mainly interested in the expansion of their trade and com-

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<sup>84</sup>Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 160-7.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup>Mohanlal, *op. cit.* I, p. 177.

<sup>87</sup>Sykes, *Afghanistan*, I, p. 397.

<sup>88</sup>Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 260-262: Text of a letter from Dost Mohammad Khan to King of Persia,

merce across the river Indus. As no powerful nation, European or Asian, was competing with them in their area of interest, they tried to press on with their commercial objectives.

The question of navigation of the Indus constituted a major objective for the British during the early eighteen thirties and British agents pursued it with active interest. When Dost Mohammad Khan was not helped by Lord William Bentinck against Ranjit Singh in the latter's capture of Peshawar in 1831, the Afghan Amir wrote letters to the Amirs of Sindh warning them against associating with or helping the British in the opening of the Indus.<sup>89</sup>

Captain Wade, therefore, wrote a letter to Ranjit Singh to exert his influence upon the Amirs of Sindh for the opening up of the Indus for navigation. Ranjit Singh in his personal interview with Captain Wade promised to favour the British move for the 'Navigation of Indus' and promised also to check any foreign move in his country, thereby, appeasing the British in withholding their support to the cause of Dost Mohammad on the Peshawar question. He also gave a hint of supporting Shah Shuja, in the latter's designs to oust Dost Mohammad Khan from Kabul.<sup>90</sup>

Captain Wade, therefore, wrote to the Governor General that the British Government could either befriend Ranjit Singh or Dost Mohammad because Peshawar was the main bone of contention between the two. Another letter throws light on an interview which Captain Wade had with Shah Shuja. The Shah produced letters which he had received from his friends and supporters in Afghanistan, inviting him to challenge Dost Mohammad Khan who was not liked by the people. But the so-called popularity of Shah Shuja in Afghanistan and the unpopularity of Dost Mohammad Khan is not proved either by any documentary evidence or by the subsequent facts. Wade, therefore,

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<sup>89</sup>The information is contained in Wade's letter dated 19-5-1832, in For. Miscel., No. 408.

<sup>90</sup>For. Miscel., No. 308: letters dated 19-12-1831, 7-1-1832, 11-12-5-1832 & 19-5-1832.

recommended to his Government, to take up the cause of the Shah against the hostile Dost Mohammad who was obstructing the fulfilment of British interest in that region.<sup>91</sup>

The period of British diplomatic indifference towards Afghanistan was coming to an end by 1832. After the treaty of Turkomanchi (1828), the Russians began to exercise a dominant influence in shaping the policies of the Persian Government, and the British Government had through their policy of indifference lost their influence at Tehran. But the hostility of the Afghans and the existence of the possibility of the Russo-Persian league threatening Herat, impelled the British Indian Government and their Home authorities, to revise their policy. As the British had completely lost their influence in Persia, they wanted to stem the Russo-Persian tide from Afghanistan. Ranjit Singh, as a trusted ally of the British Government, was to some extent willing to support, jointly with them, the cause of Shah Shuja. But according to Captain Wade, 'Ranjit [Singh was an ally from considerations of self-interest'. He wanted to possess Peshawar without exposing himself to any threat, and this was possible only when Dost Mohammad would have been removed from Kabul.

For the British the situation was indeed paradoxical. They could not befriend Dost Mohammad by supporting him on the question of Peshawar, as it would have involved a break with Ranjit Singh whose friendship they had so eagerly sought and cultivated. But British relations with Ranjit Singh had also not remained that cordial either because of their mutually conflicting interests in Sindh and in the navigation of the Indus. Ironically enough, the British did not support Shah Shuja in 1809, when he could have easily been helped to preserve his throne. Now they were not prepared to support Dost Mohammad who was well-established in Kabul while they were tending to support Shah Shuja, who by then, due to his long exile in India, had become quite out of touch with the realities in Afghanistan, and that too, against a well-entrenched Dost Mohammad.

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<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*



# 4

## Problems of the Frontier 1830-38

The main features of our policy on the north-west frontier have been determined by the gradual advance of Russia southwards, and partly also by the turbulent character of the people of Afghanistan.

—JOHN ADYE

**B**Y the eighteen thirties, the strategic importance of Afghanistan in the security considerations of India was being growingly realized and accounted for by the British rulers. But the perception of this realization was not fully crystallized due to two major complications. First, the British thinking with regard to the Sikh-Afghan rivalry was rather confused; they had not been able to evolve a method through which this rivalry could have been composed in the interest of India's security. The presence of Shah Shuja, as loyal British pensioner at Ludhiana, also exercised an inhibiting influence against the development of an objective British understanding about Dost Mohammad Khan and the compulsions of his position at Kabul. Secondly, the threat to India's security was also being visualized in the growing Russian influence over Persia, and the likelihood

of Russia using Persia as a tool to threaten the British position in India via Afghanistan. A Russian threat from the north of Afghanistan was yet to materialize as there were many inhospitable principalities still lying in between Russia's Central Asian possessions and the northern limits of Afghanistan.

### (i) Persian Context

The Russian projection in Asia was considered a reaction to her involvement in the Eastern Question. In the thinking of the British Government and their European allies, the Ottoman Empire had come to be regarded as an essential part of the European structure. Consequently, they looked upon Russia, when she made war on Turkey, as subverting the security and peace of Europe.<sup>1</sup> Britain, in particular, strove to preserve the life of the Ottoman Empire, and thus tried to arrest the disintegrating tendencies in the Balkans by opposing Russian expansionism. Checked in Europe, the Russians diverted their attention towards Central Asia where Persia was first to receive their unwelcome attention. After her ingress towards the Mediterranean was blocked, she changed her direction towards the warm waters of the Persian Gulf. As this constituted a threat to Britain's position in India, she consistently moved to checkmate the Russian designs.

The Anglo-Russian rivalry in Persia thus became an essential corollary of the European politics of balance in the nineteenth century. The intrusions into the Persian arena of Napoleonic France at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, and of Imperial Germany, in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, tended to upset the Anglo-Russian balance at Tehran. These third power interventions in Persia were essentially directed against the British interests in India although they were also anti-Russian. In such circumstances Britain tended temporarily to compose her differences with Russia. But the British attempts at compromise with Russia meant

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<sup>1</sup>Norris, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

concessions at the expense of Persia. On the other hand Britain, due to her concern for India, sought to protect Persian independence against the expansion of Russia as well as from the casual intrigues of the other European powers. From the Persian point of view, the third party interventions tended, in one respect, to protect her from the Anglo-Russian encroachments. But, from another angle, the Persian independence appeared to be endangered when as a result of these interventions Britain and Russia were willing to compromise among themselves, both against the third party, as well as to divide Persia under their joint or separate spheres of influence.

Britain was, however, unwilling to add to her already onerous imperial responsibilities: She wanted only unimpeded commercial opportunities, and the security of her Indian Empire. These aims led Britain to attempt to keep Persia away from all European dominations, specifically from that of Russia. It was, perhaps, due to these circumstances that Persia, instead of slipping under the shadow of Russian hegemony, was able to maintain her independence. The preservation of Persian independence was not so much the result of any conscious or intentional policy of Great Britain, but, perhaps, in spite of it.

Actually, it was after the Treaty of Turkomanchi (1826) that Britain, by not helping Persia, against Russia, let the latter gain an upperhand over the councils of Persia. The Russian dominance proved detrimental to Indian security. With Russian abetment, the defeated Shah of Persia was seeking solace on his eastern frontier by laying a siege to Herat in 1838.

## (ii) Countering Russian Menace

In view of the Russian advance into Central Asia and their increasing dominance over Persia, the British Government under the Duke of Wellington became apprehensive about the security of their Indian possessions.<sup>2</sup> To meet squarely, as well as to counter effectively the developing

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<sup>2</sup>Kaye, *Metcalfe*, II, p. 197, cited in Norris, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Russian menace in Central Asia, the British policy was given entirely a new direction. It was decided to separate relations with Russia in Europe from relations with Russia in Asia;<sup>3</sup> the control over the British Mission in Persia was transferred from the hands of the London Government to that of the Government of India. This was done with a view to releasing the Indian Government from the embarrassment caused by the complications of Britain's relations with Russia in Europe.<sup>4</sup>

It was, however, not only through Persia that the British were apprehending the Russian threat. The ambitions of Emperor Nicholas were already being looked upon with misgivings in England. In October 1829, there had appeared a book by Colonel de Lacy Evans on the *Practicability of an Invasion of British India*,<sup>5</sup> which exercised a considerable influence on the thinking of the British Government. The author visualized a Russian march from the Caspian Sea via Khiva and Bokhara to the northern frontiers of Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup> At that time, however, what the British backed was reliable information about the nature of the Central Asian situation—the geography of the region, and the politics and economies of the states that separated the British and the Russian empires. They, therefore, moved to obtain full and authentic information about the area,<sup>7</sup> so as to be able to comprehend the Russian threat in its proper perspective.

The Indian Government was authorized to act as an Asian power.<sup>8</sup> The Governor-General was allowed to incur expenditure freely in taking measures to counter the Russian advance; but he was not given the discretion to march an army against the Russians without prior instructions from London.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Norris, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup>Ellenborough, P.D.I., 219-20, cited in Norris, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup>Norris, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

The first act of the Governor-General was to despatch Captain Connolly and Alexander Burnes on missions to Afghanistan and Central Asia,<sup>10</sup> for exploring these regions and collecting information about the principalities lying in between India and Russia, and more importantly, to find out in detail the nature and content of the Russian interests and activities, and the extent to which the foundations of their political power in Central Asia, under the garb of commercial intercourse, had succeeded.<sup>11</sup> The British Ambassador in St. Petersburg was likewise instructed by the British Foreign Office to send back similar information. The reply of the British Ambassador, Heytesbury,<sup>12</sup> to the Foreign Office, as well as the first-hand information collected by the agents of the Indian Government, gave the lie to the apprehensions nourished by the British regarding the aggressive intentions of the Russians operating from Central Asia and also about the very practicability of an invasion of India therefrom.<sup>13</sup> The information also revealed the lack of capability on the part of the Russians to launch an army over the vast inhospitable expanse of the arid steppes, inhabited by the warring and tumultuous people over whom the Russians, till then, had but little control.<sup>14</sup> And, it was also estimated that the Russian Empire as yet had not been in possession of sufficient material means to give effect to their expansive projects,<sup>15</sup> even if they had entertained a desire to reach the northern borders of Afghanistan. But still the British thought in terms of Russia seeking political gains under the guise of commercial intercourse through which they were likely to exercise a disruptive influence against the interests of Britain.<sup>16</sup> Thus the British devised a

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<sup>10</sup>Foreign Miscel., No. 261, Remarks by E.C. Ravenshaw on a memorandum on Afghanistan and Central Asia, dated 23 August 1831.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>Heytesbury to Aberdeen, 18 January 1830, cited in Norris, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>13</sup>Foreign Miscel., No. 209, 'Invasion of Russia' by John Malcolm, 18 March 1830. p. 7.

<sup>14</sup>For. Miscel., No. 261.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*



policy of opening up Central Asia to British commerce through the navigation of the Indus by which they sought to engage themselves in repelling both Russian commerce and Russian political influence from Kabul, Khiva and Bokhara, and substituting it with that of their own.<sup>17</sup>

Innumerable British agents were commissioned to thoroughly explore the entire region lying between the Indus and the Oxus from all possible angles—commercial, political and strategic.<sup>18</sup> An intelligence system was also developed, and intelligence agents were dispersed throughout Central Asia to keep the government informed with the day-to-day developments obtaining in that area. The reports and information received from these agents were continually dissected and analysed by government officials; who, after drawing their own conclusions, advised the government on policy orientation and suggested courses of action to be taken on particular matters and in given situations.<sup>19</sup>

British policy towards Sindh can be cited as an example of this process of decision-making and policy formulation. Although, British interest in the navigation of the Indus for the purposes of promoting their trade and commerce had started much earlier in the middle of the eighteenth century; the re-assessment of the situation had added to the urgency of seeking and gaining political influence in that area. For the defence of the British possessions, and for the need of an outpost for extending British economic and political influence in and beyond Afghanistan into Central Asia, Sindh came to be regarded

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<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>Some of the agents were : Alexander Burnes, Hankey Smith, Henry & Eldred Pottingers, John Malcolm, John Macdonald, and Crow, Ellis, Seton, Elphinstone, Williams, Macartney, Connolly and Trevelyan.

<sup>19</sup>Particularly the following memoranda and opinions of the officials have been used in the study: Bonamy's 'Indus and its defence in 1830's' (Foreign Miscel., 205); Captain Wade's 'Punjab and Ranjit Singh' (Foreign Miscel., 206); John Malcolm's 'Invasion of Russia' (Foreign Miscel., 209); E.C. Ravenshaw's 'Afghanistan and Central Asia' (Foreign Miscels., 961, 262); Burnes' 'India and Russia' (Foreign Miscel., 305).

<sup>20</sup>Khera, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.

as an ideal locale. Enhancing its estimation was the strategically important sea port of Karachi. In January 1832, Henry Pottinger was sent on a mission to the Amirs of Sindh,<sup>20</sup> ostensibly to negotiate a commercial treaty, but actually to look for the possibilities of extending political influence. The envoy found the Amirs not quite amenable to have a deal with the British because of the past experiences. It was with great difficulty that he was able to overcome their reticence. But in the treaty signed in April 1832, Pottinger had to include a clause by which the parties bound themselves 'never to look with the eye of covetousness upon the possessions of each other'.<sup>21</sup> This clause proved to be the source of great embarrassment to the British, when they, eleven years later in 1843, had to annex Sindh on the pretext that the Amirs had violated the terms of the treaty by obstructing the British supply routes during their Afghan campaign of 1839-42.

### (iii) Towards the Siege of Herat

British apprehensions of the Russian menace were not wholly groundless. The reports of British agents as analyzed by John Malcolm<sup>22</sup> revealed that Prince Potemkin had presented a plan to the Tsar, giving details of Russian expansion into Central Asia, ultimately covering the British possessions in India.<sup>23</sup> Although the British considered the Potemkin plan impracticable for the time being, still they clearly foresaw its eventual manifestation, and took steps, well in advance, to forestall it. But the British concern for Russian movements in Central Asia was equally matched by the Russian suspicion of the activities of British agents in Samarkand and Bokhara. The Russians considered Central Asia within the purview of their own logical and natural sphere of expansion, as was India for the British. To effectively counter the British moves, the Russians tried to make their presence felt in Afghanistan, so as to preclude

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<sup>21</sup>Art. II of the Treaty, *vide* the Text in Khera, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>22</sup>Memorandum on the 'Invasion of Russia,' Foreign Miscel., No. 209.

It also discusses Col. de Lacy Evans' book mentioned before.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2, *et seq.*

the former from interfering in the latter's zone of operation. The Russians succeeded in transferring their confrontation with the British from Central Asia to Afghanistan, when Persia on their countenance laid a siege to Herat in 1838. Thus, the Russian danger from across the intractable steppes of Central Asia remained eventual but not immediate. On the other hand, the probability of the Russian threat, across the Caucasus via Persia, on Herat was rightly foreseen.<sup>24</sup>

Having suffered several territorial losses in the Caucasian region, Persia sought compensation in the east at the expense of Afghanistan. For some time, the Shah of Persia had extended schemes of conquest in the direction of Afghanistan and conceived that Persian sovereignty over Herat and Kandahar was as complete then as it was in the reign of the Safavid dynasty. He claimed to deal with the people of these areas as he pleased because he considered them as his own subjects.<sup>25</sup>

The immediate object of Persian ambitions was the strategic fortress and province of Herat. Russia encouraged this expansionist policy because it diverted Persia's attention from her northern borders and, at the same time, indirectly threatened the British position in India by increasing her own influence upto Herat.

The Persian claim of sovereignty over Herat was questionable. Since the days of Ahmad Shah Abdali Herat had been a part of Afghanistan, and at this point of time (1835), it was ruled by a Sadozai (a great-grandson of Ahmad Shah Abdali) with Yar Mohammad as his *vazir*, while Kandahar and Kabul were ruled by Barakhzais, Kohandil and Dost Mohammad, respectively. Till 1857, Persian rulers had several times tried to annex Herat by playing Kamran against the Barakhzais and *vice versa*, as the Sadozais and the Barakhzais were bitter enemies of each other. Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul viewed the proposed invasion of Herat by Persia with indifference; he probably looked forward to 'blotting out Kamran from the pages of the book of creation.'

<sup>24</sup>Foreign Miscel., No. 205.

<sup>25</sup>Ellis to Palmerston, 13 November 1835.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Indian government at Calcutta was alarmed at the projected seizure of Herat by the Shah of Persia under the advice of Russia.<sup>26</sup> Lord Palmerston viewed these movements with equally grave apprehensions.<sup>27</sup> It was feared that if the Persians, aided and abetted by Russia, were successful, the Russian agents established at Herat and Kandahar could easily exercise an influence over Kabul and the adjoining areas,<sup>28</sup> detrimental to the British interests. It was also realized that if such a situation did materialize, Russia, without throwing any strain on her own resources, would secure considerable influence in Afghanistan, while a serious strain would be placed on Great Britain to meet the demands of the new situation.<sup>29</sup>

In the early 1830's the Persian heir-apparent and his son Mohammad Mirza, pursuing their objective of eastward expansion, had led an expedition into Khurasan and threatened Herat. The death of both the heir-apparent and the Shah within a few months of each other, delayed, for the time being, further development of this project.

These events provided the Russian Foreign Minister, Count Nesselrode an opportunity to communicate with his British counterpart, Lord Palmerston. He expressed a hope that the British and the Russian envoys in Persia be 'authorised to act in concert and in a spirit of peace and union', with a view to ensuring the internal tranquillity as well as the territorial integrity of Persia.<sup>30</sup> Lord Palmerston cordially reciprocated the pious sentiments of the Russian Minister, the result of which was an agreement between the two governments regarding the succession of Mohammad Mirza to the Persian throne. However, Lord Palmerston, conscious of the Russian influence over Persia and the designs of the latter over Afghanistan, instructed Mr Ellis, the British representative at Tehran, to warn the Persian

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<sup>26</sup>Minute by Lord William Bentinck, 13 March 1835.

<sup>27</sup>Palmerston to the British Ambassador in Persia, 25 July 1835.

<sup>28</sup>Ellis to Palmerston, 13 November, 24 December & 30 December 1835.

<sup>29</sup>Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 49, see further p. 103 below.

<sup>30</sup>Nesselrode to Count Medem, 22 August 1834.



Government against allowing themselves to be pushed on to make war against the Afghans.<sup>31</sup> He did not mention as to who was pushing Persia, but the inference was obvious. Ellis, in his reply, portrayed a very unsatisfactory picture of the state of affairs in Persia. He cautioned his government that the Shah was too much under Russian influence and consequently not in a mood to take cognizance of British warnings on Afghanistan.<sup>32</sup>

The correspondence between London and St. Petersburg inaugurated an interesting phase of international relations which came to be known as *The Great Game in Central Asia*. From the distant capitals of the two great empires Nesselrode and Palmerston directed the operations of their respective designs of expansionism: outwardly cordial and cooperative in the so called 'cause of peace' but inwardly each distrustful of the other, both determined to lose no opportunity to secure advantage at the expense of the other; 'moving the pieces on the dim, distant chess-board of Central Asia,' with little knowledge of the details but informed by a shrewd understanding of the broad fundamental principles of the game.<sup>33</sup>

Lord Auckland, the new Governor-General, who had reached Calcutta in March 1836, came fully briefed regarding the affairs of Central Asia. Dost Mohammad Khan's relations with the British Government had become cool since Auckland's predecessor, Lord William Bentinck, had supported Shah Shuja in his abortive invasion of Afghanistan. The Amir, expecting that the new Governor-General might be more amenable to developing a friendly relationship with Kabul, addressed a cordial letter of congratulations to Lord Auckland. After expressing his goodwill towards the British, Dost Mohammad referred to the unhappy state of quarrel between the Sikhs and the Afghans.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Palmerston to Ellis, 25 June 1835.

<sup>32</sup>Ellis to Palmerston, 13 November 1835.

<sup>33</sup>Fraser-Tytler, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>34</sup>Dost Mohammad to Auckland, 31 May 1836.



The late transactions in this quarter, the conduct of reckless and misguided Sikhs, and their breach of treaty, are well known to your Lordship. Communicate to me whatever may suggest itself to your wisdom for the settlement of the affairs of this country, that it may serve as a rule for my guidance.

In conclusion the Amir added : 'I hope your Lordship will consider me and my country as your own'; Dost Mohammad little realized at that time how in effect this humble compliment would be construed as a solemn invitation and would shortly be acted upon with ironic literalness. Three years afterwards Auckland, considering Dost Mohammad's country as his own, had given it away to Shah Shuja.<sup>35</sup>

The tone of the Governor-General's reply was extremely friendly. He wished the Afghans to be a flourishing and united nation and expressed the hope that the Amir would support the British idea of promoting the navigation of the Indus as that would be for the commercial benefit and prosperity of both the British and the Afghans. For this purpose, Auckland promised to depute some one to discuss with the Amir certain commercial matters of mutual concern. Referring to Dost Mohammad's unhappy relations with the Sikhs, the Governor-General wrote :<sup>36</sup>

My friend, you are aware that it is not the practice of the British Government to interfere with the affairs of other independent states; and indeed it does not immediately occur to me how the influence of my government could be exercised for your benefit.

In the end, he hoped that the Sikhs and the Afghans, in the interests of their own mutual advantage, should come together in the spirit of friendliness and cooperation. Actually, Auckland's reply was heavily conditioned by his concern for the Anglo-Sikh alliance; but he could not say 'no' to Dost Mohammad. Instead, he asked the Amir to let him know as to how he could help. Three years later in 1839, when the British army was marching on Dost Mohammad's country, he must have felt inclined to judge the character of the British Government from the hollowness of the words of their Governor-General.

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<sup>35</sup>Kaye, *op. cit.*, I, p. 165.

<sup>36</sup>Auckland to Dost Mohammad, 22 August 1836.

Dost Mohammad was, however, fully conscious of the importance of his country to Persia, Russia and British India. By Auckland's reply he also became aware of the inhibitions of the British Government in effectively intervening in his quarrel with Ranjit Singh. The letter further supplied him fresh and sufficient reason to intrigue with Persia and Russia in order to cash in on British solicitude for isolating him from Russia; and by so doing he hoped to succeed in enlisting British support against the Sikhs. In order to gain further in the estimation of the British, Dost Mohammad intrigued in such a manner with the Amirs of Sindh for opposing the British attempts for the navigation of the Indus<sup>37</sup> as to imply that he would prefer an alliance with the British to one either with Persia or Russia.

Sending a mission to Afghanistan assumed increasing urgency in view of the alarming reports sent by Ellis from Tehran<sup>38</sup> about the arrival of the Persian agents in Kandahar, and the possibility of the extension of their intrigues to Kabul and Sindh. What worried most, Palmerston and Auckland alike, was that Russia was behind these Persian moves. Ellis was convinced that the British Government 'can no longer, with safety to its possessions in India, refrain from intimate connections with the Afghans'.<sup>39</sup> The Secret Committee's instructions<sup>40</sup> to the Governor-General made explicit the possibility of Russian influence penetrating through Persian agents. They asked Auckland to counteract the progress of Russian influence because of the proximity of those areas to their Indian Empire. They feared that if such influence was established, it would be injurious to the British interests. The Governor-General was advised to despatch an agent to Kabul for the purpose of watching the progress of events.

Lord Auckland had anticipated the instructions. Alexander Burnes and Henry Pottinger were already treating

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<sup>37</sup>Foreign Miscel., No. 308.

<sup>38</sup>Ellis to Palmerston, 1 April 1836; and note of Lord Clanricade to the Cabinet at St. Petersburg (1837-38), Appendix IX.

<sup>39</sup>Ellis to Palmerston & Auckland, 10 April 1836.

<sup>40</sup>Secret Committee to Governor-General, 25 June 1836.

with the Amirs of Sindh, ostensibly for opening the Indus to navigation in the interests of commerce, but actually trying to gain political influence.<sup>41</sup> They were trying to impress upon the Amirs, the dangers to their existence emanating from the activities of the Persian and Russian agents, and consequently the need for establishing positive relationship with the British, the natural guardians of their independence.<sup>42</sup> Burnes, called back from Sindh, was already on his way to discuss commercial matters with the Amir of Kabul, when the instructions from London reached Calcutta. According to the brief, the task entrusted to Burnes was more of political intelligence than of commercial negotiations.<sup>43</sup> Burnes had hardly reached Peshawar when further instructions from W. H. Macnaghten, Secretary to the Political Department of the Government of India, transformed his mission into a purely political one.<sup>44</sup>

The mission was received on September 21, 1837 with great pomp and splendour at Kabul—indicative of the high estimation in which the British were held by the Amir and his people, and [also, the extent to which the Amir felt the need of friendly relations with the British Government. In a secret interview with Dost Mohammad, Burnes presented a letter of the Governor-General which introduced that mission as purely a commercial one; in which he wrote :<sup>45</sup>

To your enlightened mind it cannot fail to be obvious, that commerce is the basis of all national prosperity, and that it is commerce alone that enables people of one country to exchange its superfluous commodities for those of another; to accumulate wealth and enjoy all the comforts and blessings of civilized life.

Under this facade of commerce which is the root of all politics, Burnes was to perform the functions of a spy and political agent. The real nature of the mission was explained by Burnes himself :<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup>Colvin to Pottinger, 1 September 1836.

<sup>42</sup>Macnaghten to Pottinger, 26 September 1836; and Colvin to Pottinger, 29 September 1836.

<sup>43</sup>Macnaghten to Burnes, 15 May 1837.

<sup>44</sup>Macnaghten to Burnes, 11 September 1837, *vide* Appendix VII.

<sup>45</sup>Auckland to Dost Mohammad, 15 May 1837.

<sup>46</sup>Quoted in Kaye, *op. cit.*, I, P. 176, from *The Unpublished Correspondence of Alexander Burnes*.

I came to look after commerce, to superintend surveys and examine passes of mountains, and likewise certainly to see into affairs and judge of what was to be done hereafter; but hereafter has already arrived.

Lord Auckland did not, however, invest Burnes with any real power to negotiate with Dost Mohammad Khan. Apart from getting information, he was simply to argue and report back for fresh instructions. On the other hand Dost Mohammad considered him an accredited representative of the British Government with authority to make appropriate commitments. Through the mission, Lord Auckland evidently seems to have two interests to promote: first, to seek friendly cooperation of the rulers on both sides of the river Indus,<sup>47</sup> and to keep them away from the machinations of the powers acting to the detriment of the interest of Britain; and, secondly, Burnes was asked to dissuade the Amir from insisting too much on the recovery of Peshawar which was likely to land him into a crisis which he could not face with equanimity.<sup>48</sup> The only hint which the Governor-General authorized Burnes to give was the possibility of using British good offices for settling the dispute between the Amir and the Sikh Chief.<sup>49</sup> The main aim of the British policy at this point of time was not to meddle in the quarrels of these feudal potentates, but to strive for the stability of the area in face of the Russo-Persian menace by emphasizing the virtue of moderation in settlement of disputes: 'It was wished that Ranjit Singh should be content with the past achievements and the Amirs of Sindh, and the chiefs of Herat, Kandahar and Kabul should feel themselves secure in what they held, but incapable of obtaining more; and the restless Shah (Shuja) should quietly abandon all hopes of regaining the crown of his daily dreams.'<sup>50</sup>

Dost Mohammad, after listening to Burnes about the British policy relating to the navigation of the Indus and the development of trade with Afghanistan, replied that his resources were so crippled on account of hostility with the

<sup>47</sup>Auckland to Dost Mohammad, 15 May 1837,

<sup>48</sup>Macnaghten to Burnes, 15 May 1837.

<sup>49</sup>Macnaghten to Burnes, 11 September 1837, *vide* Appendix VII.

<sup>50</sup>Government of Captain Wade, 25 September 1837.



Sikhs that he was compelled to adopt measures injurious to commerce out of sheer necessity to raise revenue. Regarding the issue of Peshawar, the Amir told Burnes that he did not want to settle it by force, and it would be a source of real gratification if the British Government could counsel him how to act without resorting to an armed conflict. As he could count on none of his other neighbours to be of any use to him in this difficulty, he looked only towards the British. In order to obtain guidance from the British Government he held out a pledge to engage himself to promote the commercial as well as political interests of Britain.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, the support over the Peshawar question was the only thing Dost Mohammad had asked for in return of all that the British wanted of him. During the negotiations, Burnes was informed of the rumours that Ranjit Singh was intending to restore Peshawar to Sultan Mohammad Khan, a brother of Dost Mohammad, in return for an annual tribute.<sup>52</sup> Such restoration, as feared by Dost Mohammad, might come about possibly through British influence. And this the Amir considered would not be a token of British good wishes towards him, rather, it would hasten the ruin of his government. He considered Sultan Mohammad Khan, although his own brother, a more fatal enemy even with a small force, than the Sikhs with their large army. Then, it was felt that with the Sikh money and arms, Sultan Mohammad Khan would become capable to intrigue more effectively under his Afghan and Muslim name than anybody else.<sup>53</sup> Dost Mohammad did not like this to happen at all. On October 4, Burnes was requested to seek British intervention to prevail upon Ranjit Singh to allow Dost Mohammad to hold Peshawar as a fief, instead of Sultan Mohammad, who in turn be only permitted to keep his estates within the territory.<sup>54</sup> Somehow, Ranjit Singh had also shown his

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<sup>51</sup>Burnes to Macnaghten, 24 September 1837; see for details Ferrier, *op. cit.*, p. 264, *et seq.*

<sup>52</sup>Burnes to Macnaghten, 4 October 1837.

<sup>53</sup>Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, I, p. 259.

<sup>54</sup>Burnes to Macnaghten, 5 October 1837.



willingness to grant this request if he were approached by the British Government.<sup>55</sup> As a matter of fact the Sikh Chief was none too happy with his newly acquired possessions west of the Indus, which he precariously maintained against the hostile population of the tribal belt. He was acutely in search of a *modus vivendi* by which he could get the revenues of Peshawar without having the onus of either collecting them, or exercising actual political control over the area.

With the Persian and the Russian designs looming on the horizon, Burnes, perhaps inadvertently, in an attempt to keep Dost Mohammad Khan away from Perso-Russian solicitation, assured the Amir that the British Government might be willing to use friendly persuasion to resolve differences between the Sikhs and the Afghans,<sup>56</sup> but they would not like to exert force on so faithful an ally as the Maharaja to abandon Peshwar.<sup>57</sup> The British opposition to Sikh expansion towards Sindh and their parlaying with the Amir of Kabul had made Ranjit Singh suspicious of British intentions, and consequently, averse to yielding to their pressure over Peshawar. Burnes' letter containing these proposals was sent straight to Auckland, who agreed that Dost Mohammad 'was far too ambitious for his own good'.<sup>58</sup> In early December Macnaghten warned Burnes to be cautious in dealing with the Afghan.<sup>59</sup> He also emphasized that it was British policy to preserve 'the existing state of affairs in Central Asia, and to refrain from being a party to any arrangement which should give to any one chief a preponderance'.<sup>60</sup>

But also, by then the Governor-General and his advisers had become so much obsessed with the Russo-Persian danger that in their anxiousness to obtain a pledge from Dost Mohammad Khan to withstand the intrigues of these two powers and to extend his support to Herat in the event

<sup>55</sup>Government to Wade, 31 July 1837.

<sup>56</sup>Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, I, p. 258.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>Norris, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>59</sup>Macnaghten to Burnes, 2 December 1837.

<sup>60</sup>*Vide* Norris, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

of a Persian attack, they simply did not care to pause as to what Dost Mohammad Khan desired in return. While the Amir of Kabul had no sympathy for Kamran Mirza, and looked upon Ranjit Singh as his main enemy, the British Government insisted that Dost Mohammad should break with Persia (and Russia) before their good offices could be employed in his favour.<sup>61</sup> The British, it seems, had no intention of supporting Dost Mohammad Khan, but simply wanted to use him as a pawn in the furtherance of their ends. This was made abundantly clear in the instructions to Burnes :<sup>62</sup>

It must be nearly needless to say that you are in a position in which you should regulate your conduct making the firm maintenance of our old alliance and friendship with Ranjit Singh as the avowed first principle of our duty and policy and bringing Dost Mohammad to his senses and to a just measure of his most hazardous position.

In brief, the British dilemma was that they needed an active cooperation of both Ranjit Singh and Dost Mohammad Khan for the success of their Central Asian policy, but it was well nigh impossible for them to maintain alliances with the two antagonists at the same time.

The political scene at Kabul was gradually becoming complicated. Dost Mohammad Khan had realized by a shrewd understanding of affairs that the British wanted to strike a one-sided bargain, by not consenting to help on the question of Peshawar against Ranjit Singh, but still wanting him to have no truck with Persia or Russia, and, instead, to support the Sadozai ruler of Herat. Therefore, he chose to flirt with Persia and Russia in order to coax the British to support him. He communicated the same grievances to the rulers of Russia and Persia, as he had conveyed to the British Governor General.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, started a strange but interesting drama in which the Amir of Kabul, in the perfect role of the head of a buffer state, was playing one power against the other, in

<sup>61</sup>Macnaghten to Burnes, 20 January 1838.

<sup>62</sup>John Colvin (Auckland's private secretary) to Burnes, 13 September 1837.

<sup>63</sup>Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 260-62.

order to promote his interests, and more importantly, to preserve the integrity of his state. Dost Mohammad had sent communications to the Shah of Persia<sup>64</sup> and the Emperor of Russia<sup>65</sup> through the Governor of Siberia, representing to both of them that the Sikhs enjoyed the British support and might get the better of him which would result in nothing but damaging the interests of Russia and Persia; and that the British commerce would destroy the trade between Bokhara, Persia and Kabul. This letter was sent to the Emperor of Russia through his agent Husain Ali, in which the Amir explained the advantages of Russia, Persia and Afghanistan uniting into an alliance, both in the interests of commerce and the needs of political expediency. The Amir, while seeking the help and protection of both the powers against the Sikhs, showed his readiness to cooperate with the Shah of Persia in the intended attack upon Herat.<sup>66</sup>

At the same time, Dost Mohammad Khan was impressing upon Burnes that he did not fancy any alliance other than that of the British, while showing his equal keenness for recovering Peshawar.<sup>67</sup> Burnes, waiting for positive instructions from the Governor-General, could hardly do anything on his own but to hold out to the Amir vague assurances of sympathy and goodwill of his Government.

Meanwhile, reports were being received in Kabul about a Persian Envoy Qambar Ali who had won over Kohendi Khan and his brothers of Kandahar by concluding a treaty<sup>68</sup>--the execution of which had been guaranteed by Count Simovich, the Russian Ambassador at Tehran--with them guaranteeing non-interference in each other's affairs as also in the territorial ambitions of either against the third party. By the most important provision of the treaty, Persia was able to secure the neutrality of the Kandahar chiefs in her designs against Herat; and the Shah promised to bestow the princi-

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, Text of the letter.

<sup>65</sup>*Vide* Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 263-4.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, and Ellis quoted in Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, I, p. 278.

<sup>67</sup>Burnes to Macnaghten, 30 December 1836.

<sup>68</sup>Text of the Treaty in Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-292; Note from Clanricade to the Cabinet at St. Petersburg, (1837-38), Appendix IX.

pality of Herat upon the rulers of Kandahar as a reward, in case the Persians were able to capture that city. And further, the two parties agreed to exchange ambassadors; the son of the ruler of Kandahar would be the first Afghan ambassador to Persia, and his arrival at Tehran would synchronize with the despatch of a Persian expedition against Herat. This actually happened. Mohammad Omar, son of Kohendil Khan of Kandahar was present in the Persian camp when Mohammad Shah embarked upon his invasion of Herat.<sup>69</sup>

Alongwith it, Sardar Meherdil Khan of Kandahar advised by the Shah of Persia and the Russian Ambassador at Tehran, Count Simonich, arrived at Kabul with the avowed purpose of frustrating the designs of the British Envoy and aligning Dost Mohammad with Persia and Russia against the Sadozai rulers of Herat. He advised the Amir to demand from Burnes a written commitment on the part of the British Government to protect Kabul and Kandahar against the Persian designs, and also exercise influence against Ranjit Singh to give up all the Afghan territory he had annexed with the British connivance; and if the British could not give them such a guarantee, the Amirs would have no alternative but to align themselves with Persia and Russia, who were, unconditionally and without reservations, offering help to recover Peshawar.<sup>70</sup>

In order to stem the tide of Russo-Persian intrigue, Burnes engaged himself in safeguarding the interests of his government. First, he despatched General Leech to Kandahar<sup>71</sup> to dissuade the *sirdars* from getting too much involved with the Shah of Persia, and much less to attempt to win over the Amir of Kabul to the side of the Shah. And secondly, Burnes held out promises of British help to Dost Mohammad in the event of any foreign attack on his country and also purported to have given assurance to the Amir that the British Government might, likely, exert pressure to

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<sup>69</sup>Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, I, p. 351.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 311.

<sup>71</sup>Burnes to Leech, 25 December 1837.

secure peace between the Sikhs and the Afghans, provided that the Amirs severed all relations with Persia.<sup>72</sup>

Both the attempts of Alexander Burnes misfired. Leech's mission accomplished just the opposite of what it was intended to do. Burnes' offer of money and personal assistance to protect Kandahar against the Persians was not taken on its face value, but was construed as an intrigue to subvert the growing friendship of Kandahar rulers with Persia.<sup>73</sup> Contributing to the British discomfiture was the presence of a Russian agent at Kandahar. Dost Mohammad was also not quite sure of a British commitment against their ally, Ranjit Singh. Seemingly, Dost Mohammad still preferred an alliance with the British and sent a letter of warning to his Kandahar brothers against dabbling with Persia and Russia, and asking them instead to seek British friendship. And in spite of the Perso-Russian offers, Dost Mohammad was repeatedly approaching Burnes with a view to testifying the sincerity of his offers. Dost Mohammad was demanding from Burnes a real commitment from the British Government for the restoration of Peshawar alongwith a large sum of money for his defence, as well as his recognition as the Amir of Kabul.<sup>74</sup>

Dost Mohammad Khan had, perhaps, correctly suspected the authenticity of the promises of Alexander Burnes. The British Envoy was trying his level best to save the situation, in spite of the fact that he had not been invested with any real authority nor any real political power, to counter-bargain the promises of Russia and Persia and thereby to negotiate a deal with the Amir in order to cope with the emergency. Although Burnes was not quite sure whether his commitments were strictly in accordance with the instructions of his government, he thought them quite necessary and expedient in dealing with the situations then

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<sup>72</sup>Burnes to Macnaghten, 23 December 1837.

<sup>73</sup>Vicovich to Simonich, 27 November 1837 (96), text in Mohanlal *op. cit.*, I, pp. 327-333; and also Burnes to Kohendil Khan, 22 December 1857.

<sup>74</sup>*Vide* Ferrier, *op. cit.*, p. 271; and Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, pp. 309-310.



obtaining, and in conformity with the overall policy of his government and the interests it was seeking to promote.

By way of explanation and in order to convince the government of the appropriateness and correctness of his action, Burnes wrote to the Governor-General a confidential letter on December 23, 1837, setting forth in detail his assessment of the situation and the measures he proposed to deal with it. He marshalled his arguments with clarity and prescience becoming of an experienced diplomat who does not hesitate to advocate a line of action which he realizes might be unpalatable to his chief. He drew pointed attention to the unhappy effect on the Afghans of Ranjit Singh's aggressive policy and of British indifference. The Afghans were, in his estimate, being driven in despair to seek help from Russia and Persia. In the end he expressed his conviction that as soon as the British showed an interest in his affairs, the Amir was prepared to sever all other connections and ally himself with the British, who were in a position to bring peaceful pressure on the 'Sikh Khalsa'. Burnes then emphasized the need of some speedy adjustment of the Peshawar dispute—the only irritant between the Sikhs and the Afghans. He believed that the aggressiveness of the Maharaja was driving the Afghans to seek alliances inimical to the British interests. He advised the Governor-General to use his influence to bring about a sort of rapprochement between the Sikhs and the Afghans in the interests of peace and security of the British Empire. The concluding words of the letter,<sup>75</sup> however, bear ample testimony to the extent of his efforts towards that direction :

...In the settlement of the Peshawar affair we have as it seems to me, an immediate remedy against further intrigue, and a means of showing to the Afghans that the British Government does sympathise with them, and at one and the same time satisfying the chiefs, and gaining both our political and commercial ends ..

And concerning the steps he had taken to salvage the British position in Kandahar, he wrote to Macnaghten :<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Burnes to Auckland, 23 December 1837.

<sup>76</sup>Burnes to Macnaghten, 23 December 1837.

... In the critical position .. I saw no other course left but that I followed... Herat may withstand the attack of the Persians, but if not and the Shah marches to Kandahar our position in the East becomes endangered, and the tranquillity of all the countries that border on the Indus.

The Governor-General and his advisers were too much preoccupied with honouring 'the just wishes of their firm and old ally 'Ranjit Singh' to listen to the protestation of Burnes; rather, they censured him for exceeding his brief. Lord Auckland, in his letter to Dost Mohammad Khan of January 20, 1838, distinctly refused to accept practically everything that Burnes had negotiated with the Amir. The Governor-General stated in unmistakable terms that Peshawar must remain with the Sikhs, and the utmost the British Government could do for the Amir, in case he refrained from having any relations with either Persia or Russia, was to restrain the Maharaja from attacking Dost Mohammad Khan.<sup>77</sup> Macnaghten<sup>78</sup> and Colvin<sup>79</sup> rebuked Burnes in their letters for the unauthorized commitments of British aid to the Amirs of Kabul and Kandahar. They voiced the fears of Lord Auckland that Burnes had unduly raised the hopes of Dost Mohammad of British aid and assistance. In brushing aside Burnes' recommendations regarding the Amir's demands for financial aid, the Governor-General was guided by the considerations that it would not have served to bind the Amir to cooperate with the British nor to promote their interests; but it would have afforded him ample means for using his arms against the Sikhs and against the interests of the British Government.<sup>80</sup> It was also not considered feasible to recognize Dost Mohammad as the Amir of Kbaul, because that would not only have meant a British guarantee for the then territorial limits of the Amir's dominions, but the Amir would have interpreted it as a British consent for the recovery of Peshawar; and this would have become a constant source of

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<sup>77</sup>Auckland to Dost Mohammad, 20 January 1838; Boulger, *op. cit.* p. 93.

<sup>78</sup>Macnaghten to Burnes, 20 January 1838.

<sup>79</sup>Colvin to Burnes, 21 January 1838.

<sup>80</sup>Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

embarrassment for the British relations with Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Hence 'no quarrel with Ranjit Singh on account of Dost Mohammad' had become by then the accepted policy of the Government of India; the Governor-General wrote to Hobhouse :<sup>81</sup>

...It would be madness in us, though we may wish to his (Dost Mohammad) independence assured, to quarrel with the Sikhs for him...

In fact, by censuring Burnes, Auckland was repudiating his own policy in the furtherance of which he had despatched the mission to seek the friendship of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan. In the imminent failure of Burnes' mission, the entire edifice of a sound and consistent policy was cracking. There was lack of a firm policy; as in Persia where British assistance to the Shah against the Russian excesses had been withheld in clear disregard of the obligations of the Treaty of 1814, similar was the case in Afghanistan. They asked a great deal from Dost Mohammad and offered him practically nothing in return. If in these circumstances the Amir was inclining to fall back on Persia and Russia, whose fault it was? Dost Mohammad turned to the other side only after he lost hope of gaining the assistance of the British Government.

At Tehran too, the British position had become precarious due to the ascendancy of the Russian Ambassador, Count Ivan Simonich. Mr Ellis, the British representative, had completely failed in dissuading the Shah of Persia from his projected adventure on Herat. The Russian Envoy acted in a manner that made it difficult for Ellis, as well as his successor John McNeill to understand and follow the Russian diplomacy. He appeared to have frequently acted against the orders of his government and yet had continued to enjoy its confidence. His influence over the Shah was considerable. The aim and direction of his policy was, if not the invasion of India, at least to raise British apprehensions. Such a policy was totally opposed to the professions of his government. Count Nesselrode had informed

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<sup>81</sup> Auckland to Hobhouse, 13 February 1838.

Palmerston that his government did not want to interfere in the affairs of Persia, and was as a matter of fact against Persia's intended invasion of Herat, and that he had asked the Russian Ambassador at Tehran to refrain from encouraging the Shah to take up the project.<sup>82</sup> But Palmerston was not convinced of the Russian protestations. After the Persians had abandoned the siege of Herat, Count Simonich was recalled and his policy repudiated by the Russian Government. However, the British attributed Simonich's recall to his failure, and the repudiation of his policies to their hostile demonstration in the Persian Gulf.

John McNeill, conscious of the importance of Herat to the security of India, tried to dissuade the Shah from undertaking the expedition against that principality. He told the Persian Monarch that such an action on the Shah's part would be considered inimical to British interests, and would act adversely on the friendly relations between the two countries.<sup>83</sup> Simonich, however, continued to encourage the Shah to persist in his designs by promising that Persia would not have to repay the Russian debt if she succeeded in taking Herat and that the Emperor might also contribute to the expenses of the campaign.<sup>84</sup>

At Kabul, the presence of the Russian agent, Vicovich adversely affected the task of Burnes and exercised an aggravating influence on the Anglo-Afghan parleys. For Auckland, the looming of the Russian bugbear tended understandably to inhibit a rational consideration of the problem. But the fears entertained by the British Government were not wholly groundless. Vicovich, who reached Kabul in November 1837, had come via Kandahar where he had already contributed to the British discomfiture. He is purported to have brought the letters of the Russian Emperor and Count Simonich from Tehran.<sup>85</sup> Dost Mohammad, after reiterating the desire of aligning himself only with the British Government, sought Burnes' permission to receive the Russian mission.

<sup>82</sup>Nesselrode to Pozzo di Borgo, 1 September 1838; See also Lord Clanricade's note in Appendix IX.

<sup>83</sup>McNeill to Palmerston, 30 June 1837.

<sup>84</sup>McNeill to Palmerston, 3 November 1836.

<sup>85</sup>Burnes to Macnaghten, 20 December 1837; Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 292:-310; and Appendix IX.

Burnes, understanding Dost Mohammad's game playing one power against the other, replied that it was the sacred rule among the civilized nations not to refuse to receive emissaries in time of peace and that the Amir would not commit any wrong in receiving Captain Vicovich, provided that the Russian Envoy was duly accredited; on the contrary, in receiving the mission with dignity and hospitality, he would show his good sense.<sup>86</sup>

Dost Mohammad was trying to use the presence of Vicovich as a bargain to induce Alexander Burnes to commit himself in one way or the other. He spoke in a manner as if he felt no interest in the Russian mission, and sought Burnes advice as to how he should deal with it. Burnes was not moved. He replied that the Amir being the ruler of Kabul knew best how to receive and treat foreign guests and agents.<sup>87</sup> The Amir refused to give up. In order to gain Burnes' confidence he showed the British Envoy the letter of the Russian Emperor which was purely commercial, and, although, it expressed friendly sentiments, had no reference to political matters.<sup>88</sup>

Captain Vicovich then started operating. It was circulated that the Russian Envoy had the authority from the Tsar to promise Russian help against the Sikhs for the recovery of Peshawar while the British agent had no such power, nor even the Governor-General, without previous sanction from London.<sup>89</sup>

Burnes' position was being compromised and his ability to manoeuvre greatly restricted by the inflated promises of Vicovich, and also by Lord Auckland's unmistakable reply<sup>90</sup> that the British Government would not consider extending any help to Dost Mohammad until the Amir had severed all connections with the powers to the west of his country. Dost Mohammad was, however, playing for time in the hope that one country or the other would come out unequivocally in his favour. Neither did he immediately answer Lord Auckland's letter of January 20, nor did he

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<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup>Auckland to Dost Mohammad, 20 January 1838.



dismiss Vicovich. He was badly in need of an ally. As a matter of fact, the Amir seemed to have been greatly disturbed by the Governor-General's cool and steadfast attitude.

Burnes having been censured for pleading Dost Mohammad's case, the Amir was losing hope of gaining anything more from the British Government than that which had already been put forward by the Governor-General. He, however, felt that Lord Auckland had not adequately answered all his offers of compromise. Still he would not give up his game of wait and see. He once more revived the hopes of Alexander Burnes by writing a letter to Lord Auckland on March 21, asking only for '*... a little encouragement and power.*'<sup>91</sup> He no longer insisted upon a written pledge, but still flatly refused to give an undertaking of his peaceful intent towards Ranjit Singh, required by Auckland as a necessary pre-requisite to adjust the differences between the Sikhs and the Afghans.<sup>92</sup> The Amir wrote to the Governor-General that he had heard of British friendliness towards the Afghans and when he asked for proof of it none was forthcoming: '*you refuse all pledges and promises, and... do nothing for me.*'<sup>93</sup> Though still insisting that he would prefer an alliance with the British to that of Persia and Russia, he told Burnes that he had lost every 'description of hope' from the British Government.

Burnes communicated these developments to Lord Auckland who, then, was obliged to take a serious view of the situation. By the end of April, the Governor-General went through a period of 'agonising reappraisal.'<sup>94</sup> His hopes of the so called peace and conciliation were being shattered, but he had the consolation of an old and firm alliance with Maharaja Ranjit Singh. To the Amir, he wrote a letter of regret at the refusal of British good offices;<sup>95</sup> while through Macnaghten, he instructed Burnes

<sup>91</sup>Dost Mohammad to Auckland, 21 March 1838.

<sup>92</sup>Burnes to Macnaghten, 24 March 1838.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup>Norris, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

<sup>95</sup>Auckland to Dost Mohammad, 27 April, 1838.

to retire from Kabul. Macnaghten, in his letter of April 27,<sup>96</sup> clarified the attitude of the British Government by enlisting the main charges against Amir Dost Mohammad Khan : that he had not only broken the promise of dismissing Vicovich but continued to intrigue with the Russian agent; that he still refused to write to Ranjit Singh for improving his relations with the Sikhs; and despite this recalcitrance he hoped that the British would assist him against Persia, while still cherishing an alliance with that country. Burnes was instructed to frankly tell the Amir that his alliance with Persia would be taken as an hostile act by the British Government, and by his so doing, 'he will incur a new danger, probably far more serious than is to be apprehended by him, under any circumstances...' Burnes was also remonstrated for the conduct of his mission.<sup>97</sup>

Under the circumstances, where Auckland and Dost Mohammad had fallen apart, there was hardly anything left for Alexander Burnes to do but to seek his leave from the Amir as required by his Government. He was dismissed by Dost Mohammad without any hesitation.

Dost Mohammad, however, found himself in a very miserable position. The Russian Envoy promised much but offered him little. When the Russo-Persian combine became unsuccessful at Herat under the threat of British intervention, and also when the British settled their policy to replace Dost Mohammad by Shah Shuja on the throne of Afghanistan, the ground began to shake under the feet of the Amir. The new friends were not able to assist.

This was the pattern of Indo-Afghan relations when the siege of Herat was in progress. Before entering upon the description of the war which ensued in Afghanistan, it would be proper to describe in brief the British attitude towards the memorable siege.

Herat is one of the most important places in Central Asia, as described by various British travellers and agents.

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<sup>96</sup>Macnaghten to Burnes, 27 April 1838.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*

It was thought to be one of the most fertile valleys of the world, called in the good old days as the '*Granary of Central Asia*.'<sup>98</sup> The most important aspect of Herat for the British was its strategic position and its roads, which were tractable to artillery between Persia, Kabul and Kandahar. It was also thought to be a secure fortress. Zulfikar Pass, opening towards Russian Turkistan, was the weak spot for the British in India due to the Russian threat during the nineteenth century.

Such was the position of Herat, with much exaggerated reports of its importance made by the British secret agents, when the Persians were prosecuting their siege. The ruler of Herat was Kamran, a Sadozai, nephew of Shah Shuja.

Sir Henry Ellis, in his attempts to dissuade the Persian Government from the projected invasion of Herat, had already warned the Shah that his Government '*would look with great dissatisfaction on the prosecution of any schemes of extended conquest in Afghanistan*'.<sup>99</sup> What the British most feared in the Persian scheme of expansion was the possibility of the extension of Russian influence on the very threshold of India. In a memorandum<sup>100</sup> to Lord Palmerston, Henry Ellis tendered an important advice, which became the cornerstone of British policy towards the Persian adventure on Herat:

I feel quite assured that the British Government cannot permit the extension of the Persian monarchy in the direction of Afghanistan, with due regard to the internal tranquillity of India.

It has already been noticed in the foregoing pages that John McNeill's efforts were fruitless in checking the Shah of Persia from the invasion. When Herat withstood successfully against the Persian siege, McNeill thought it worthwhile to endeavour once more to get the siege raised by persuasion. He informed Lord Palmerston of his proposed intention, and accordingly directed Colonel Charles Stoddart, who was with the Persian army. He also wrote to the

<sup>98</sup>Foreign Miscel., No. 205.

<sup>99</sup>Ellis to Palmerston, 8 January 1836.

<sup>100</sup>Ellis to Palmerston, 15 January 1836.

Indian Government that the situation at Herat was serious and urged strong measures to arrest the Persian advance.<sup>101</sup>

On April 6, 1838, McNeill arrived at the camp of Mohammad Shah. He had pushed on with all possible speed to the Persian Camp in spite of the efforts made by the Persian ministers to arrest his progress at Ghorian. It was urged that his presence could not fail to encourage the Heratees in their resistance. But McNeill pleaded his duty to his sovereign and refused to be detained. He was coldly received in the Persian camp, and with much difficulty he was presented to the king. Somehow he induced the Shah to negotiate with Shah Kamran. But the Russian Ambassador Count Simonich, was also coming to the Persian camp and McNeill thought that his own work might be left undone.<sup>102</sup>

In this interview with the Shah, he stated that the advance of Persia into Afghanistan was an obvious violation of the treaty between Great Britain and Persia; and that the British Government would be justified, therefore, in declaring it to have ceased to be operative, and in taking active measures to compel the withdrawal of the Persian army from Herat.<sup>103</sup>

The negotiations for peace were started by Major Todd by opening parleys with Shah Kamran. Todd was followed by McNeill, who carried with him, to the defenders of Herat, the assurance given by Mohammad Shah to agree to the arbitration of the British. Pottinger, who had been the main architect of the defence of Herat, joined the British Envoy in an interview with Shah Kamran. Kamran agreed to the restoration of amity with the Shah of Persia only if the siege was withdrawn. At this stage of peace talks, during a temporary absence of McNeill from the Persian camp, the Russian Minister Simonich managed to exert an unsettling influence over Mohammad Shah's mind and the result made itself manifest just the following morning. McNeill returned to find the Shah's views disquietingly altered and his manner pronouncedly abrupt and pre-emptory. The

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<sup>101</sup>McNeill to Auckland, 7 March 1838.

<sup>102</sup>McNeill to Palmerston, 11 April 1838.

<sup>103</sup>McNeill to Auckland. 11 April 1838.

Shah at once rejected the proposals for the agreement and spoke of prosecuting the siege,<sup>104</sup> while McNeill could do pretty little to retrieve the position. Both at Kabul and in Persia, British diplomacy had thus suffered severe discomfitures within a few weeks of each other. McNeill continued to remain for a time in the Persian camp, but his position became extremely difficult. He felt strongly and wrote strongly both to England and India, but there intervened the time lag usual for those days of six months before he could receive a reply from London. And without instructions McNeill could hardly call the Shah's bluff.

McNeill, however, did what he could in the unenviable circumstances in which he found himself. He suggested to Auckland to move a force to help the Heratees with the cooperation of Afghanistan if possible, and without such cooperation if necessary, and undeterred by the obligations of the Anglo-Persian Treaty of 1814 that had committed Britain to non-interference in a Perso-Afghan war.<sup>105</sup> Then the British Envoy made an attempt to have an audience with Mohammad Shah, but was prevented from doing so and treated with discourtesy. His letters to Pottinger were siezed by the Persians and his messenger was manhandled. The British Consulate at Bushire was threatened and eventually looted. McNeill's movements were also restricted under the orders of the Persian Monarch.<sup>106</sup>

McNeill after receiving the permission to leave the Persian camp,<sup>107</sup> sent a strong note to the Persian Foreign Minister who was present in the Persian camp at Herat and announced his intention to depart the following day and demanded reparations and satisfaction immediately. The Shah of Persia and his ministers, however, ignored McNeill's threats. McNeill's departure from the camp at Herat made the

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<sup>104</sup>McNeill to Palmerston, 12 May 1838.

<sup>105</sup>McNeill to Auckland, 7 March 1838; See also the Text of the Treaty in Appendix VI (a).

<sup>106</sup>McNeill to Palmerston, 25 November 1837; Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, pp. 279-80, 283.

<sup>107</sup>Palmerston to McNeill, 24 August 1838.



rupture between Persia and Britain complete. Palmerston<sup>108</sup> and Auckland,<sup>109</sup> both concurred with McNeill that Persia, acting on the advice of Russia, had embarked upon an action which could not but be injurious to British interests. Lord Auckland did not take much time in ordering the Indian armed forces to take punitive action against Persia. A British naval landing on the Island of Kharak was ordered for safeguarding British interests.<sup>110</sup> McNeill also received instructions from London to stage a strong demonstration against Persia, and he despatched Colonel Charles Stoddart back to the Persian Camp with a message to the Shah that the occupation of Herat or any part of Afghanistan would be considered an act of hostility by the British Government, and that the Shah could not hope to persist in his course without inviting immediate '*peril of injury to Persia*.'<sup>111</sup> The message also warned the Shah that if amends were not made for the insults and losses caused to the British, simultaneously with the raising of the siege of Herat, the force at Kharak 'would not tarry to go into action.'<sup>112</sup> The receipt of this message completely upset the Shah's calculations, and he consulted his ministers in consternation and replied 'we concede all the demands of the British Government. We would refrain from going to war. Were it not to preserve their friendship, we should not have agreed to retrace our steps from Herat. Had we known that our coming here might risk the loss of their friendship, we certainly would not have come at all.'<sup>113</sup> Stoddart was satisfied but demanded from the Persian Foreign Minister that these protestations of the Shah should be forthwith followed by corresponding performance. The seige was raised on September 9, 1838.

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<sup>108</sup>Palmerston to McNeill, 21 May 1838.

<sup>109</sup>Auckland to Secret Committee, 27 April 1838.

<sup>110</sup>Auckland to Secret Committee, 1 May 1838.

<sup>111</sup>Palmerston to McNeill, 21 May 1838.

<sup>112</sup>McNeill to Stoddart, 10 July 1838.

<sup>113</sup>Stoddart to McNeill, 12 July 1838; see also Boulger, *op. cit.*, p. 99 below.

# 5

## The First Afghan War 1839-1842

The frontier wars are but the surf that marks the edge and the advance of the wave of civilization.

—LORD SALISBURY

**W**HILE the Persians were prosecuting their siege on Herat with Russian encouragement and assistance, British Indian Government were devising measures to safeguard their Afghan frontiers. The danger was accentuated by the state of feverish unrest into which the bordering states appeared to have been plunged.<sup>1</sup> From the hills of Nepal and the jungles of Burma came 'the mutterings of threatened invasion.' Internally, India seemed to be on the verge of civil commotion due to the rumours of the invasion from the north-west. The states of Indore, Jaipur, and Jodhpur were all in various degrees of confusion; strong measures against the Gaekwad of Baroda appeared to be called for, and war with Ava and Nepal was imminent. In the Muslim mind, a hope, akin to the one entertained at the time of the threatened invasion of Zaman Shah, was taking shape for the speedy restoration of Muslim rule in India. The Muslim

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<sup>1</sup>Auckland to Secret Committee, 13 August 1838.

journals were showing the signs of disdainful sedition.<sup>2</sup> There was a decline in the value of public securities; and it went openly...that the Company's Raj was nearly at an end.<sup>3</sup> With these ominous portents only the Sikhs Confederacy represented stability. As the British frontier was still on the Sutlej, they could not ignore the Sikhs whose territories lay between them and Afghanistan. It was, therefore, decided to further strengthen their friendship with Maharaja Ranjit Singh which was considered as the only option for controlling the internal situation of India, as well as to stall the dangers from the north-west.

Initially the British thinking was in favour of strengthening the rule of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan at Kabul as a barrier against any intrusion from beyond the Afghan frontiers. However, the British were not inclined to gain the favour of the Amir at the price of their friendship with the Sikhs. There were, however, several arguments, both for and against this policy. Some, like Burnes and McNeill preferred winning over Dost Mohammad at all costs. This is obvious from McNeill's dispatch to Alexander Burnes :<sup>4</sup>

I sincerely wish, if the Amir Dost Mohammad Khan and you come to a good understanding, that he were in possession of both Candahar and Herat... He ought to be precluded from receiving any other foreign representative or agent of any kind at his Court, and should agree to transact all business with foreign power through the British agent. Unless something of this kind should be done, we shall never be secure.

Burnes was, however, censured by Auckland in trying to follow the advice of McNeill. Captain Wade had apprehended that any help given to Dost Mohammad might be used by him to recover Peshawar to the embarrassment of British friendship with the Sikhs. McNeill had also urged the Governor-General to take strict measures to foil Persian success at Herat.

After a careful consideration of various alternatives<sup>5</sup> suggested for dealing with the situation, Auckland in

<sup>2</sup>Foreign Miscel., No. 331, Newsletters of April 1839.

<sup>3</sup>Kaye, *op. cit.*, I, p. 290.

<sup>4</sup>McNeill to Burnes, 13 March 1837.

<sup>5</sup>For the various courses open to the British Government see Burnes to Macnaghten, 2 June 1838, in Appendix VIII,

collaboration with his advisors decided to replace Dost Mohammad Khan with someone who could be more amenable to British advice, as well as accept Maharaja Ranjit Singh's occupation of Peshawar and the other Afghan territories. Shah Shuja was a person who fulfilled these requirements. The policy was defined in the Governor-General's minute of May 12, 1838 as <sup>6</sup>

...Granting our aid or countenance in concert with Ranjit Singh to Shah Shujaul Mulk to re-establish his sovereignty in the eastern division of Afghanistan, under engagements which shall conciliate...the Sikh ruler and bind the restored monarch to the support of our interests.

Thus the idle designs and restless intrigues of the Persians and the Russians caused the dispute of the Sikhs with the Afghans and the British scheme of opening the Indus to commerce to merge together in the project of restoring Shah Shuja over the throne of Afghanistan. Lord Auckland had decided to lend support to Shah Shuja because he thought that the Afghans would, accept him as they were habituated of accepting a new ruler every now and then. As a pensioner of the British Government, Shuja was expected to be a more faithful ally, while Alexander Burnes and Captain Wade estimated that the Shah would get a ready welcome in Afghanistan. Captain Wade had also supplied the Governor-General with letters of Afghan chiefs who were ready to support Shah Shuja.<sup>7</sup> The strengthening of friendship with Ranjit Singh was also decided upon as a settled feature of British Policy. However, in choosing Shah Shuja, the fact was ignored that he had already three times tried and failed to fill the role for which he was now cast. Also, the Governor General and his advisors failed to visualize how the Afghans would react to the imposition of an unwanted and rather undesirable ruler with the help of foreign bayonets.

Originally, Lord Auckland had not contemplated the despatch of a British army into Afghanistan. It was thought that a liberal subsidy and a small number of officers would be quite sufficient in addition to the aid by a Sikh

<sup>6</sup>Cited in Boulger, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>7</sup>For. Miscel. No. 308; Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, pp. 366-68.

army to enable the Afghan Prince to regain his throne; but the Sikh ruler was not disposed to oblige the British Government by accepting the onus of re-establishing Shah Shuja in Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> When, in May 1838, the restoration of Shah Shuja was finally decided, Lord Auckland commissioned Sir William Macnaghten to apprise the Maharaja of the decision of the British Government and solicit his cooperation.<sup>9</sup>

During the negotiations, Macnaghten suggested the revival of the Treaty of 1833 with his Government guaranteeing it. Ranjit Singh initially expressed his reluctance, but after careful rethinking accepted the proposition. Thus the wish of Auckland to make the Sikhs a party to the restoration of Shah Shuja was apparently accomplished.<sup>10</sup> Ranjit Singh also agreed to recognize the independence of the Amirs of Sindh and withdrew his claim to Shikarpur on the condition that Shuja paid him a part of the tribute as compensation. But the desire of the Governor General to remain in the background only jingling with the money-bag was not fulfilled. The Maharaja was emphatic; he wished to act only in concert with the British and not independently.<sup>11</sup> Lord Auckland initially did not contemplate taking a leading part in the campaign, but it is equally clear that Ranjit Singh gradually forced him to do so. The Sikhs extracted immense advantage from the bargain. It is not known what actually transpired between the negotiators, but Macnaghten hinted at the possibility of his government taking up the task of restoring Shah Shuja with its own troops if it 'might find necessary to do so.'<sup>12</sup> The hint was indeed a delicate one and brought Ranjit Singh round; it paved the way for the Tripartite Treaty which was signed by the Maharaja on June 26, 1838.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Government to Wade, 15 May 1838; Masson to Macnaghten, 8 June 1838.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>Governor-General to Secret Committee, 13 August 1838.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>Macnaghten to Government, 3 July 1838.

<sup>13</sup>Text in Appendix X.



Ranjit Singh got all he wanted. The treaty confirmed his trans-Indus possessions. No one was to cross the Indus or the Sutlej without his permission. Affairs of Sindh were left to be settled between the British and the Sikhs. The Shah gave up all claims to Sindh and the British were to collect the tribute from the Mirs and make required payments directly to the Maharaja. The Shah undertook to send his troops in pursuance of the obligations of the treaty as and when they might be required by the Maharaja; who in return 'may send his troops as far as Kabul' and would be paid for such services by the Shah. And, lastly, the Shah bound himself to deal with any foreign potentate only with the consent of the British and the Sikhs, and undertook to oppose any power having designs against their possessions. Such was the nature of the treaty which Auckland sent for the signature of Shah Shuja through a mission consisting of William Macnaghten, Frederick Mackeson and Claude Martine Wade, which reached Ludhiana on July 15, 1838. The Shah objected to various articles, and after being assured by the mission adhered to the treaty. The mission left Ludhiana on July 17.<sup>14</sup>

It is really interesting to note the most notable change in the unfolding of the tragic drama which, during the summer of 1838, transferred the role of leading actor from Ranjit Singh to Lord Auckland,<sup>15</sup> Macnaghten on his arrival at Simla explained to the Governor-General the unwillingness of Maharaja Ranjit Singh to take the full responsibility which was considered to be his in Government of India's planning. For Shah Shuja, it was thought to be an uphill task to raise within a reasonable time a disciplined force capable enough to ensure his success. By August, therefore, Lord Auckland came to the conclusion that a British force must be sent to Afghanistan for setting up Shah Shuja on the throne.<sup>16</sup> One of the notable dissenters of Auckland's policy was Alexander Burnes, the most experienced diplomat of

<sup>14</sup>Wade to Macnaghten, 5 October 1838, *vide* Kaye, *op. cit.*, I, p. 371.

<sup>15</sup>Tytler, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>16</sup>Auckland to Secret Committee, 13 August 1838.

Afghan affairs, who considered his imperative duty to emphasize.<sup>17</sup>

...It remains to be reconsidered why we cannot act with Dost Mohammad. He is a man of undoubted ability, and has at heart a high opinion of the British nation; and if half you must do for others were done for him, and offers made which he could see conduced to his interests, he would abandon Russia and Persia tomorrow.

However, on the return of Macnaghten preparations were started to put the contemplated course of policy into immediate execution. The Governor-General gave orders that a force be assembled at Karnal in Punjab for the determined invasion of Afghanistan. Auckland, Ranjit Singh and Shah Shuja were to inspect the army before its destined march.

In the meantime Auckland prepared the major policy document, known as the Simla Manifesto, which was published on October 1, 1838,<sup>18</sup> as the declaration of war. It was circulated in all parts of India and Afghanistan and published in the newspapers of India and England. Perhaps the underlying aim of giving it such a wide publicity was to suppress, as far as possible, the growing pro-Afghan and anti-British feelings among the people of India.<sup>19</sup>

The *Manifesto* was not simply a declaration of war on the rulers of Kabul and Kandahar; it was very much an enunciation of British policy towards Afghanistan, Persia and Central Asia; and displayed an acute awareness on the part of the British Government of the importance of Afghanistan in the defence strategy of their empire. The document is a significant specimen of cool, calculated but subtle logic of imperialist policy. It accused the rulers of Kabul and Kandahar for acting in the interests detrimental to the well-being and security of the British possessions in India. It enumerated a catalogue of sins of Dost Mohammad, Kohendil Khan and the Shah of Persia; and accused them of treachery and double-dealing.

<sup>17</sup>Burnes to Macnaghten, 2 June 1838, *vide* Appendix VIII.

<sup>18</sup>Text in Appendix XI. Sykes is of the opinion that it might in some parts have been drafted by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. *Afghanistan*, II, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup>Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, p. 379.

There was no mention of Russia, but the inference was obvious :<sup>20</sup> the fear of the Russian danger materializing through these 'anti-British' principalities was permeated in between the lines in the entire declaration; it was also indicative of the thinking alike of its author, Auckland, and its progenitor, Palmerston. 'Far out in the distance beyond the mountains of the Hindu Kush there was the shadow of a great northern army, tremendous in its indistinctiveness, sweeping across the wilds and deserts of Central Asia towards the frontiers of Hindustan.'<sup>21</sup>

A Russian army had actually left Orenburg in 1839, with the intention to suppress the Khan of Khiva who was intriguing with a British agent, Abbott.<sup>22</sup> The Khan had approached the British Government for help against Russian aggression, and Palmerston had addressed a note of protest to the Government at St. Petersburg to that effect.<sup>23</sup> The British, however, lost their interest in Khiva after hearing that the Russian army had perished in its onward march in the inhospitable wastes of Central Asia.<sup>24</sup> But, in the autumn of 1839, the shadow of Russian aggression was indeed frightening, and that partly accounts for Auckland's persistence in implementing his Afghan project.

The Manifesto was denounced by the Indian press as a collection of 'Absolute Falsehoods.'<sup>25</sup> There were also many notable critics of the Governor-General's policy. To Henry Durand, the project of re-establishing a worthless exile upon the Afghan people was an unprovoked aggression against Dost Mohammad and the cause of all subsequent troubles which the British had to face in Afghanistan.<sup>26</sup> According to Keene, 'the only parallel to Auckland's policy was Louis XIV, endeavouring to expel William of Orange, to make

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<sup>20</sup>Auckland to Hobhouse, 13 October 1838.

<sup>21</sup>J.G. Elliot, *The Frontier 1839-1947*, p. 15

<sup>22</sup>Abbott to Macnaghten, 25 March 1840

<sup>23</sup>Palmerston to British Ambassador at St. Petersburg, 14 April 1840.

<sup>24</sup>Palmerston to British Ambassador at St. Petersburg, 16 November, 1840.

<sup>25</sup>Persian Miscel., S. Nos. 9 and 27.

<sup>26</sup>H.M. Durand, *Sir Henry Durand*, I, p.40.

room for James Stuart.<sup>27</sup> Lord Auckland's Commander-in-Chief, Sir Henry Fane was more sensible in his advice: 'Every advance you might make beyond the Sutlej to the westward...adds to your military weakness... Make yourselves complete sovereigns of all within your bounds. But let alone the far West.'<sup>28</sup> The Duke of Wellington considered that 'our difficulties would commence where our military successes ended. The consequences of crossing the Indus once, to settle a government in Afghanistan, will be a perennial march into that country.'

In spite of the criticism from several influential quarters, Lord Auckland continued to set up the stage for the First Afghan War. Whatever might have been the real cause underlying the decisions of the Governor General, he was, by and large, acting in accordance with the wishes of the Home Government and with their tacit approval.<sup>29</sup> In fact the direction of his policy was determined by the instruction of the Secret Committee;<sup>30</sup> and they had to an extent increased his bellicosity towards Dost Mohammad.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps, Auckland's hands were so much tied that he could have followed no other course. The Governor General was conscious of the weakness of his policy when he wrote to Hobhouse<sup>32</sup>

I am sensible that my trans-Indus arrangements are in many points open to objection, but I have no time to pause. There was no choice between them and the more objectionable course of remaining passive—and a friendly power and an... intimate connection in Afghanistan, and a peaceful alliance with Lahore, and an established influence in Sindh are objects for some hazards may well be seen.

Auckland had also justified his decision to the Director in his dispatch of August 13:<sup>33</sup>

<sup>27</sup>H.G. Keene, *History of India*, II, p. 143.

<sup>28</sup>*Vide* Kaye, *Metcalf*, II, p. 306.

<sup>29</sup>Secret Committee to Governor General, 5 November and 26 December 1838.

<sup>30</sup>Palmerston to Hobhouse, 25 August 1838.

<sup>31</sup>Palmerston to Hobhouse, 27 August 1838.

<sup>32</sup>Auckland to Hobhouse, 23 August 1838.

<sup>33</sup>Auckland to Hobhouse, 13 October 1838.

It will be for others to judge of my case, and I will say nothing of it, except that I could have made it stronger if I had not had the fear of Downing Street before my eyes...but I have no want of sufficient grounds of quarrel with Persia...

Immediately after the publication of the Manifesto a few men-of-war had been ordered, through the Bombay Government, to land troops on the Persian island of Khar-rak, as has been described in the preceding chapter.

For Afghanistan it was suggested that a big strength of British forces should be collected at Ferozepur, and in company with Shah Shuja, should march upon Kabul, passing through Sindh, the Bolan Pass, Kandahar and Ghazni,<sup>34</sup> and that Prince Timur, son of Shah Shuja, conjointly with the Sikh contingent, would so shape his course through the Punjab, as to divert the attention of the Kabul chief to the Khaiber Pass. The rendezvous of the troops, now named as the 'Army of the Indus', was ordered to be at Ferozepur, where the Governor General had an interview with Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

On the arrival of the dispatch of Colonel Stoddart,<sup>35</sup> stating that the Persians had raised the siege of Herat, many people who claimed to be well informed in the affairs of Afghanistan, expressed the view that there remained no necessity any longer for the Government of India to persevere in taking the English army beyond the Indus into those distant regions.<sup>36</sup> Strangely enough, Auckland decided not to be guided by that policy and in a proclamation issued on November 8, 1838 in which the raising of the 'Siege of Herat' was announced, he declared that he would continue to prosecute with vigour : '...the measures which have been announced, with a view to the substitution of a friendly for a hostile power in the Eastern provinces of Afghanistan, and to the establishment of a permanent barrier against the schemes of aggression on the North-west Frontier.'<sup>37</sup> The Persians still continued to occupy certain Afghan territories notably the district of Ghorian. The British agents

<sup>34</sup>Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, I, p. 387.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 391-92.

<sup>37</sup>Auckland to Hobhouse, 9 February 1839.



continued to exercise pressure on the Persian Government to give up the possession of these places, but upto November 1838 the agents had not succeeded in their efforts. Actually, the fort and district of Ghorian were not restored to the Government of Kamran Mirza till a year after the British were in occupation of Kabul and Kandahar.<sup>38</sup>

The raising of the siege of Herat, however, reduced the size of the Army of the Indus, Lord Auckland seems to have been impelled by reasons of great weight and importance to press for the completion of his contemplated objective.<sup>39</sup>

The avowed object of the expedition, as set forth in the November declaration, was the establishment of a friendly power in Afghanistan. The subversion, however, of an existing dynasty could only be justified on the ground that its hostility threatened to disturb the peace and tranquillity of the British dominions in India. Whatever the hostility of the Barakhzai Sirdars might have been when Mohammad Shah was in front of the gates of Herat, it had ceased to be justifiable.<sup>40</sup>

The Army of the Indus, however, assembled at Ferozepur as planned. Macnaghten and Burnes were chosen as political agents to head the expedition. Due to the objections of Ranjit Singh to the British army traversing the Punjab, it was decided that the march should be conducted through Bahawalpur and Sindh. In April 1839, the invaders reached Quetta, where the army from Bombay under General Keene joined it. Meanwhile, Dost Mohammad Khan could not get the promised Russian help, despite repeated requests and negotiations. And Kohendil Khan of Kandahar also was not able to get the promised Persian help. After the Persian debacle at Herat, he fled from Kandahar leaving the city open for Shah Shuja. So there was no opposition and the army entered the city in May.

The Army stayed at Kandahar for the consolidation of routes and provision of supplies to meet Dost Mohammad.

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<sup>38</sup>Kabul Papers, I, 2 October 1839.

<sup>39</sup>Mohanlal, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 391-92.

<sup>40</sup>Elliot, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

The first step which Macnaghten took was to send Major Todd to Herat, where he concluded a treaty with Kamran Mirza. By this treaty the British in concurrence with Shah Shuja, promised not to interfere in the internal matters of Herat. Kamran, on the other hand, pledged his neutrality in the war with Dost Mohammad.<sup>41</sup>

After a brief skirmish, Dost Mohammad fled beyond Bamian, and Shah Shuja entered Kabul on August 7, 1839 after an exile of thirty years. Dost Mohammad Khan, after some hesitation, surrendered himself to Macnaghten and was honourably sent to Calcutta, with a letter to Auckland<sup>42</sup> asking that : Dost Mohammad Khan be treated more generously than was Shah Shuja, who had no claim on us. We had no hand in depriving Shah Shuja of his kingdom, whereas we ejected the Dost, who never offended us, in support of our policy, of which he was the victim.'

It seemed for a while that the Afghans were not pleased with Shah Shuja. To Macnaghten the situation was quite satisfactory and he was in a mood to stay on in Kabul indefinitely. In his misplaced confidence he sent back a sizable number of the force to India. But there were critics in England, like the Duke of Wellington, who prophesied that 'Our difficulties would begin where our military success ended' and there were others nearer at hand also who, as the clouds darkened over Kabul in the summer of 1841, warned the envoy of the approaching storm. But Sir William Macnaghten was proof against all such warnings. His typically bureaucratic mind was disposed to pursue his cherished policy with utmost rigidity until it betrayed the signs of unworkableness.<sup>43</sup>

In the peaceful respite of 1840, when after the death of Ranjit Singh, conditions in the Punjab deteriorated, Macnaghten pressed upon the Governor General the desirability of restoring Peshawar and the territory up to the Indus to Shah Shuja. This plan, in which only two years before the unwillingness of the British to acquiesce had constituted

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<sup>41</sup>Todd to Macnaghten, 15 May and 1 October 1839, in *Kabul Papers*, I.

<sup>42</sup>Quoted in Elliot, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>43</sup>Fraser-Tytler, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

the main impediment to friendliness between the Government of India and Dost Mohammad, now appeared to the envoy as essential to the consolidation of Shah Shuja's power. The Afghans were also not satisfied with the British rule. Shah Shuja chafed against the restraints placed on his activities. Not only that, the traffic in women which sprang up between the city and the cantonment led the Afghan anger rise to fever heat.<sup>44</sup>

Lord Auckland's idea in sending the British army to Kabul was to restore Shah Shuja on the Kabul throne and the British forces were to be withdrawn after helping in the initial consolidation of his rule. The Governor-General had not contemplated the annexation of Afghanistan, much less to permanently station the army at Kabul. But after occupation it was realized that Shuja was incapable of maintaining himself without the support of the British arms. The British were, in fact, caught in a dilemma. They could not withdraw and leave Shah Shuja in the lurch; rather, they were inclined to continue to rule in his name. The Sikh friendship was also in tatters. Ranjit Singh had not allowed the passage of the Army of the Indus through his territories—the shorter and less expensive route. His successors were now obstructing the supplies of troops and convoys; British hegemony over Afghanistan was not quite to their liking. Thus the two signatories of the tripartite alliance had for all practical purposes ceased to be the partners—Shuja by his incapacity and the Sikhs by their hostility; the British were left as the lonely crowd giving affect to the unholy alliance.<sup>45</sup>

In the spring of 1841, the cost of the continued occupation of Afghanistan started causing much anxiety in Calcutta and London. The Court of Directors expressed the view to the Governor-General<sup>46</sup> that it was about time to choose between remaining in Afghanistan for a much longer time and with an increased force, or of getting out

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<sup>44</sup>Fraser-Tytler, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>45</sup>For the British dilemma, see the Minutes of Sir Jasper Nicolls, 10 November 1840 and 19 August 1841, in Appendices XII (a) and (b).

<sup>46</sup>Secret Committee to Governor General, 4 June 1841.

altogether. They were convinced that there was no middle course to pursue 'with safety and with honour.' Lord Auckland, however, chose the middle course and directly precipitated the disaster. Occupation was to continue but its cost was to be reduced. This was done by reducing the garrison in Kabul and by cutting down the subsidies paid to the chiefs. The Ghilzais immediately revolted and Sale's Brigade which was returning to India, had to fight its way through Jalalabad. In Kabul and in the neighbouring districts disaffection was spreading.<sup>47</sup> It was for the first time that Macnaghten was compelled to realize, as others did since then, as to how different an aspect of the same problem may appear when viewed from Simla and Kabul.<sup>48</sup>

The first evidence of Afghan dissatisfaction took the form of an attack on the house of Alexander Burnes. Burnes was shortly to succeed Macnaghten, and the occupants of the house, including Burnes, were massacred. Strangely enough, this incident did not induce Macnaghten to take any precautions. On the other hand, he started to negotiate with the rebellious son of Dost Mohammad Khan, Sirdar Akbar Khan, for the peaceful evacuation of all the British forces from Kabul and was killed while negotiating with him.

A week later, a treaty was signed by the British officers and eighteen Afghan chiefs for the safe evacuation of the British troops under Afghan escort. Some British officers, including Pottinger, were held as hostages, and at the end of the prolonged and difficult march back only one Englishman, Dr. Brydon, was spared to reach Jalalabad to tell the tragic tale to Sale's Brigade.<sup>49</sup>

Thus the first British attempt to gain control of the Hindu Kush ended disastrously. In the autumn of 1842, the British forces again entered Afghanistan from Peshawar and Kandahar and committed the great Bazar of Kabul to

<sup>47</sup>Kabul Papers, I, February 1841.

<sup>48</sup>Shah Shuja to Governor General, 12 Muharram 1257 A.H. (1841); also Wellington's Memorandum of 29 January 1842 on Macnaghten's letter of 26 October 1841.

<sup>49</sup>Sykes, *Afghanistan*, II, p. 36.

consuming flames as a measure of retribution and rescued the British prisoners.<sup>60</sup> After thus restoring, in their estimation, the British prestige, the British forces quitted the country and unconditionally allowed Dost Mohammad Khan to resume his interrupted reign; Shah Shuja having been murdered during the pillage.

The first important item of British loss was the besmirching of the prestige of a nation whose Empire had never in the East suffered such humiliations. On the other hand, while the British restored the status quo, they could not restore what they had utterly destroyed—the Afghan faith in British justice and fair dealing, which had been built up by Mountstuart Elphinstone in 1809.

For the Afghans, this unjust invasion earned a reputation of treachery, which they hardly deserved. Although, from the Western concept of civilized conduct, the Afghans were looked upon as uncivilized and barbarous, the rulers of Afghanistan had demonstrated a high sense of integrity in normal dealings during peace time. But in war and diplomacy resort to all devices to get rid of the foreigner were fair to the Afghans, as to all other nations. Auckland thought of the Afghan conduct as treachery, while Dost Mohammad considered it in the nature of things, dictated by circumstances and perfectly moral.

This unfortunate chapter in British-Afghan relations served as a good lesson to the British empire builders not to meddle in the affairs of the far off lands and taught them to follow a policy of non-entanglement and non-interference. This policy henceforth came to be accepted as the cornerstone of British foreign policy in the following decades. To some, this tragic finale provided two of the innumerable causes of the Indian Mutiny. First, the defeat destroyed the Indian belief in the British invincibility; and secondly, it taxed the Indian treasury in such a manner as to bring about a complete bankruptcy. It was thought that if the money would have been saved and employed in the

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<sup>60</sup>Kabul Papers, I, Introduction.



upliftment of the Indian people, the Mutiny might not have occurred.<sup>51</sup>

While there is an element of truth in the above assessment of Annie Besant, certain other results that followed the war cannot be overlooked. It must be remembered that the British were interested in protecting their Indian Empire from the dangers of the north-west. This required the neutralization of Afghanistan so that it could act as a bulwark against Russian expansionism.

Apparently, it seemed that the British had signally failed to establish a friendly buffer state. However, as it will be seen later, the British did eventually succeed in achieving this objective. Sir Olaf Caroe's historical note convincingly asserted that the above result could not possibly have been achieved by diplomacy alone.<sup>52</sup>

However, the object of British policy was not simply to make Afghanistan a buffer state but to initiate a forward policy in Central Asia to countermine the Russian march towards Afghanistan.<sup>53</sup> The Persian seige of Herat was used merely as a pretext, and neither its withdrawal nor the Russian assurances could dissuade the British from marching into Kabul. There is also ample evidence to prove that Macnaghten and his government wanted to use Afghanistan as a base, as well as a stepping stone for seeking influence and, perhaps, expansion into Central Asia.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, it appears that the British, as a result of the traumatic experience, changed their objective.

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<sup>51</sup>Annie Besant, *England, India and Afghanistan*, p. 97.

'...are we likely to lose India by Russian invasion ? We are more [likely, as was wisely said in 1842, to lose India by "financial convulsions" than by war.'

<sup>52</sup>*Vide* Johan C. Griffiths, *Afghanistan*, Appendix I, pp. 143-44.

<sup>53</sup>Charles Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, II, pp. 738-39, cited in Singhal, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup>*Vide* Kabul Papers, I, Macnaghten's correspondence from Kabul with the British agents in Central Asia, 1840-42.

# 6

## Masterly Inactivity 1842-1869

Lord Lawrence's policy of 'Masterly inactivity' stood the test of time.\*

**A**FTER the tragic finale of British diplomacy in Afghanistan, the policy pursued by Lord Auckland was reversed. Lord Ellenborough issued a proclamation on October 1, 1842,<sup>1</sup> setting forth that the British army be withdrawn from Afghanistan. He left it to the Afghans to create a government of their own choice, while at the same time recognizing as inconsistent with the policy of his government to force a sovereign upon the reluctant people, as his predecessor had done. The Governor General expressed his willingness to recognize any government approved by the Afghans themselves; which should appear desirous and capable of maintaining friendly relations with neighbouring states. With this change in policy, the retention of Dost Mohammad Khan and other Afghans in the power of the British Government became no longer justified or expedient.<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, Dost Mohammad Khan was allowed to

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\*Dharm Pal, *op. cit.*, p, 26.

<sup>1</sup>For the Proclamation, see Appendix XIV.

<sup>2</sup>Sykes, *Afghanistan*, II, p. 61.

resume his interrupted reign in Kabul. His immediate object was to consolidate his power and to unify Afghanistan under his own banner. Kohendil Khan had reappeared at Kandahar and resumed his rule. Yar Mohammad Khan was ruling at Herat in the name of the Sadozai puppet, Kamran Mirza.

Internally, Dost Mohammad faced a new situation arising out of the three years of British occupation. Notwithstanding the destructive role of the British aggression, it had integrated the rebellious instinct of the Afghans into an anti-British feeling which had regenerated a sense of nationalism into the Afghan people. This sense of nationalism was not, however, rationally directed; it was largely irrational and to an extent irresponsible. It was left to Dost Mohammad to mould this feeling into constructive channels.

Externally, Dost Mohammad was somehow reconciled with the rule of his own Barakhzai brother, Kohendil Khan, in Kandahar; but he was in search of opportunities to recover Herat and Peshawar to fulfil his dream of a united Afghanistan. For Herat, he tried, on the one hand, by establishing contact to win the friendship of the Persian Government;<sup>3</sup> while, on the other hand, he made attempts to woo the rulers of Herat so as to dissuade them from falling under the Persian influence.<sup>4</sup> While playing these rulers against each other, he was waiting for an opportune moment when the Shah of Persia might not be offended by his expansionist move, and the rulers of Herat precluded from obtaining Persian help. Then he turned his attention towards Peshawar and Derajat, over which the Sikh hold was weakening after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

The fateful controversy had begun after the fall of Zaman Shah, when Ranjit Singh had gradually annexed Peshawar, Derajat, and Kashmir from the Afghan Empire.

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<sup>3</sup>Punjab correspondence, 9 October 1854 *vide* Kabul Papers, II. Official papers and correspondence referred to in this Chapter are from Kabul Papers, Vols. II and III, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

After the death of Ranjit Singh in 1839, changes in Sikh rulers were quick and their relations with the British Government deteriorated. In 1845, Ranjit Singh's son Dilip Singh occupied the throne of Lahore. But disorder and anarchy continued unabated in the Punjab and Dilip Singh could not live upto the expectations of his people and was soon enough replaced. The British Government took full advantage of the waning power of the Sikh Khalsa. There was no strong man among the Sikhs to check the British in their designs, and by 1846, Kashmir had come under the British influence and British agents were appointed at Jullundur, Peshawar and other strategic points on the Afghan frontier.<sup>5</sup>

In 1848, the Sikhs revolted against British interference. Dost Mohammad Khan was advised to take advantage of the Anglo-Sikh differences and recover Peshawar and Dera-jat.<sup>6</sup> He, however, considered such an act contrary to the undertakings given to the British, and was also certain that the British would intervene with their superior military might against any such move by the Afghans. His advisers were of the opinion that the proposal had no bearing upon his relations with the British and was purely confined to his relations with the Sikhs who had not hesitated to occupy Afghan territory, when Afghanistan was weak.<sup>7</sup> The Amir had to succumb to the pressure of the 'War-party' led by his son Akbar Khan, who had emerged as a hero of Afghan resistance against the British occupation, and made a bid to regain Peshawar. Initially the Afghan forces met with success in capturing Peshawar; but the anticipated British intervention forced the Afghans to retire precipitately.<sup>8</sup> Although Dost Mohammad suffered humiliation as a result of the abortive adventure, internally, he gained as the influence of Akbar Khan and his party, who had instigated the move, declined considerably.<sup>9</sup> Akbar died immediately afterwards

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<sup>5</sup>Boulger, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

<sup>6</sup>Arnold Fletcher, *Afghanistan*, pp. 119-121.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

in 1849 and Dost Mohammad gave up his idea of recovering Peshawar.

As a result of the two wars (1845 and 1848-49) with the Sikhs, the British not only added the Punjab but also Peshawar and Derajat to their dominions, while they had already conquered Sindh in 1843 when their army was marching back after the war in Afghanistan. As already observed, Sindh was annexed on the pretext that the Mirs had obstructed the supplies and convoys to the British occupation force in Afghanistan. In both these cases 'the fundamental underlying cause was the juxtaposition of stability and instability, of ordered government and of misrule; the Empire pushing on in its search for a frontier and finding no halting place, no physical or man-made barrier, on which its outposts could be aligned and behind which its nationals could move in freedom and safety'.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, Dost Mohammad Khan was also busy consolidating his dominions. He was able to annex the northern territories of the Afghan Turkistan [in 1850,<sup>11</sup> and after the death of Kohendil Khan in 1855, Kandahar was also joined to his dominions.<sup>12</sup>

The Anglo-Afghan relations between 1842 and 1852 remained in what can be termed as a state of suspended animation. The two parties remained involved in their internal problems. However, as a result of the British expansion westward, no intermediary states were left in between the British and the Afghan frontiers by 1849. This brought them into a direct physical contact. The need of a dialogue started being felt on both sides. Still, the animosities engendered by the first Afghan War continued to inhibit their thinking and prevented them from entering into a direct relationship. This state of affairs was aptly described by Lord Dalhousie as one of 'sullen quiescence on either side, without offence, but without goodwill or intercourse'<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Fraser—Tytler, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>11</sup>Sykes, *Afghanistan*, II, p. 64.

<sup>12</sup>Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

<sup>13</sup>Minute of Lord Dalhousie, 14 March 1854.



However, two factors compelled them to develop intimate relationship.

First, there was a belt of territory lying in between the new British possessions and Afghanistan which were inhabited by the Afghan tribes who looked towards the Afghan ruler with kindred feelings. The need of a safe and scientific frontier required British control over the tribal belt that included the strategic passes of Khyber and Khojak-Bolan; and for which the British needed not only good neighbourly relations with the Afghans but also their active cooperation in controlling the strategic but unruly area.\*

Secondly, there was a noticeable increase in the Russian activity in Central Asia; and the Persians once more with Russian encouragement, were tending to threaten the security and independence of Herat. These developments, compelled both the British Government and Amir Dost Mohammad Khan to come to terms with each other in the interests of the safety of their possessions.

The twin problems—of controlling the tribal belt and that of security against the Russo-Persian combination—got mixed up in the great controversy over the British frontier policy that started in early 1850s. Adding to the complication was the question of re-establishing relations with Dost Mohammad Khan which were in a state of freeze since 1842. Herbert Edwards, the Commissioner of Peshawar chalked out a policy in which he favoured the resumption of relations with the Amir of Kabul<sup>14</sup> in view of the dangerous movements of Russia and Persia. Edwards had the backing of the Governor General, Lord Dalhousie, while his immediate superior Sir John Lawrence, the Chief Commissioner of the Punjab, was opposed to it.

Lawrence advocated non-interference in the affairs of Afghanistan, and even canvassed the advisability of a with-

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\*Dost Mohammad's interest in the tribal belt and his desire to be consulted in respect of the matters of that area, see his son M. Azim Khan's communication to British Govt. dated 29 September 1857.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, see also Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

drawal of the British frontier to the banks of the Indus,<sup>15</sup> considering the hazards of controlling the turbulent people of the tribal belt in face of an invasion from beyond the Hindu Kush. Lawrence was of the opinion that any danger from beyond Afghanistan could better be tackled from London through diplomatic negotiations with the Government at St. Petersburg.<sup>16</sup> As for Persia, he believed that she could do little harm to the British Empire, and if at all she showed her belligerency, that could be more easily countered by sending an expedition to the Persian Gulf than by getting bogged down in the inhospitable lands of the Afghans.<sup>17</sup> The policy advocated by John Lawrence came to be known as the policy of 'Masterly Inactivity'.

Then there was Sir John Jacob, the administrator of Sindh, who favoured an even more aggressive policy of marching over the Hindu Kush to checkmate the dangers emanating from the north-west.<sup>18</sup>

However, before these different and conflicting points of view were properly formulated and taken into account by the Government, the Persian move over Herat became imminent.

#### (i) Herat Question Again (1852-57)

The British Government had already detected the Russian move in Central Asia when they received the news of renewed Persian interest in the affairs of Herat.<sup>19</sup> After the death of Yar Mohammad Khan in 1851, his son Said Mohammad had become the ruler of Herat. In order to strengthen his shaky position at home, Said Mohammad started negotiating with the Shah of Persia. By so doing he also wanted to forestall the moves of Dost Mohammad Khan who was planning to annex Herat to his dominions.<sup>20</sup> The British Government was alarmed by the news of the

<sup>15</sup>Dharm Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup>Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-86.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>Dharm Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 6; Tytler, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>19</sup>Memorandum on Central Asia, 2 January 1852.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

Persian advance towards Herat, and the possibility of a change in the affairs of that strategic principality. Since the estrangement with Dost Mohammad, independence of Herat, both from Persia and Kabul, had become a sheet-anchor of British policy. In pursuance of this objective, therefore, Sir John Sheil, the British agent at Tehran, extracted an engagement<sup>21</sup> from the Persian Government by which the Shah committed himself to protect the integrity of Herat and to relinquish all claims and titles over it. The Shah further engaged not to send troops to Herat excepting when troops from outside attacked the place; but for that too the Shah had to take a prior permission of the British Government.

However, the Shah of Persia was greatly annoyed with the British Government because of this engagement which he had to accept under pressure. And, with Russian agents making overtures to enlist Persian cooperation in their war with Turkey, the Shah of Persia was encouraged to break off relations with the British Government. The British Ambassador was compelled to leave Persia at the end of 1855.<sup>22</sup>

Dost Mohammad Khan was watching the situation with considerable interest and was in search of an opportunity to utilize the situation to his own advantage. He had turned down a Persian proposal for an alliance against the British. The unfriendly attitude of Persia towards Herat and Afghanistan had equally alarmed Dost Mohammad Khan and the Indian Government; and, finally, after more than a decade of hostility and suspicion, they engaged themselves into an alliance of 'perpetual peace and friendship'. By the terms of the treaty,<sup>23</sup> signed on March 30, 1855, they agreed 'to respect and never interfere in the territories of each other'.

While the Anglo-Persian relations were at breaking

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<sup>21</sup>The Engagement was entered into on 25 January 1853; see Appendix XV (a).

<sup>22</sup>Sykes, *Persia*, II, 346-348.

<sup>23</sup>Text in Appendix XVI (a)

point, the situation at Herat was developing in a manner to enlist the attention of the three contending parties. Said Mohammad Khan was deposed by a Sadozai prince, Mohammad Yusuf.<sup>24</sup> Yusuf had been, for a long time, a pensioner of the Persian Government at Meshhad. He was suspected to be a Persian nominee, and hence considered to be a palatable instrument of his former benefactors. It was not precisely known to what extent this change of government in Herat was really due to the machinations of the Persian Government. The British Ambassador at Tehran had informed the Governor General that Yusuf wanted to establish friendly relations with the British Government.<sup>25</sup> Simultaneously, the Ambassador, before departing from Persia, had also communicated to Yusuf the sincere wish of his Government that Herat would remain independent of foreign control, promising British help in case it was threatened.<sup>26</sup> Lord Dalhousie, however, turned down the recommendation of the Ambassador to send an envoy to Herat on the ground that it would displease Dost Mohammad Khan."

On the death of Kohendil Khan (in 1855) Dost Mohammad after gaining control over Kandahar, became anxious to utilize the opportunity offered by the prevailing confusion at Herat and by the deterioration of Anglo-Persian relations. He sought the help of the British Government in his ambitions over Herat. Yusuf Khan became apprehensive of Dost Mohammad's intentions and turned towards Persia for support.<sup>28</sup> While the Governor-General of India intimated Dost Mohammad that although it was the object of British policy to maintain the independence of Herat against the encroachment of the Persians, but for that he would not countenance Dost Mohammad's endeavours in that direction.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Letter from Tehran dated 28 November 1855.

<sup>25</sup>British Ambassador at Tehran to Lord Dalhousie, 28-11-1855;

<sup>26</sup>British Ambassador to Yusuf, 28-11-1855.

<sup>27</sup>G.G.'s note dated 6 December 1855.

<sup>28</sup>A letter enclosed in correspondence of Yusuf to Dost Mohammad dated 20 June 1856.

<sup>29</sup>G.G. to Dost Mohammad, 16 June 1856.

The approach of the Persian army (in the spring of 1856) was initially welcomed but gradually it became clear that it was sent not to help Mohammad Yusuf against the threat posed by the Amir of Kabul, but to make the principality of Herat a part of the Persian Empire. The ruler of Herat finding himself in a paradoxical situation, turned now towards Dost Mohammad Khan for help, asking him to request the British to coerce Persia to abandon the seige.<sup>30</sup> Yusuf also hoisted a British flag on his fort declaring that his request to the Persian Government was a mistake and that he was really a vassal of the British Government.<sup>31</sup> This internal turmoil, which ensued in Herat in the wake of Persian siege, brought about the downfall of Mohammad Yusuf and his replacement by another Sadozai, Isa Khan. These confusions facilitated the Persian occupation of Herat in October 1856.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, Dost Mohammad had sent all communications of Yusuf Khan for the perusal of Governor-General with a request for the British intervention as the Persians had captured and annexed Herat against the will of its people.<sup>33</sup> Lord Canning was further informed that Dost Mohammad had outrightly rejected the Persian overtures for making a common cause against the British.<sup>34</sup> And more important were the reports that the Persians were acting on the advice and encouragement of the Russian Government.<sup>35</sup>

The British Government was alarmed by the Persian seizure of Herat and the accompanying intrigues of the Persian agents near the British border of Sindh, in Kelat.<sup>36</sup> These developments provided the British an immediate

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<sup>30</sup>Vide letter dated 20 June 1856.

<sup>31</sup>Vide G.G. to Dost Mohammad, 16 June 1856.

<sup>32</sup>Arnold Fletcher, *Afghanistan*, p. 122.

<sup>33</sup>Dost Mohammad to G.G., 19 June 1856.

<sup>34</sup>Ghulam Haider to G.G., 26 June 1856; and Dost Mohammad to G.G., 12 July 1856.

<sup>35</sup>Yusuf to Dost Mohammad, 20 April 1856.

<sup>36</sup>Lord Canning on Persia and Dost Mohammad, dated 6 August 1856.



*casus belli*. They promptly declared war on Persia. An expedition was despatched to the Persian Gulf which occupied the island of Kharrak in December 1856, and when the Persians refused to yield, a British force commanded by Sir James Outram disembarked near the Persian port of Bushire and continued its march in the direction of Shiraz.<sup>37</sup> The object of the British Government, however, was to use pressure sufficient to oblige the Shah to withdraw from Herat.

Perhaps another element which had prompted the British to use force against Persia was to indirectly prevent Dost Mohammad Khan from intervening in the affairs of Herat whom they had already dissuaded. The British Government lost no time in strengthening their position *vis-a-vis* Persia by increasing their bonds of friendship with Amir Dost Mohammad Khan. The Amir was invited to Peshawar to negotiate a second treaty of friendship and mutual assistance with the British Government. The treaty signed on January 26, 1857,<sup>38</sup> was an extension of an agreement of the preceeding year whereby the Amir was given a sum of Rupees five lakhs for strengthening his own defences and to relieve Herat from Persian aggression.<sup>39</sup> Under the terms of the new treaty, Dost Mohammad Khan was promised a subsidy of Rupees one lakh per month during the period of hostilities with Persia, and was also provided with a large amount of ammunition. The Amir, however, refused the stationing in Afghanistan of a British military mission and British officers to supervise the Afghan army because this would have rekindled the traumatic memories of the first Afghan War. To this, the British Government agreed; and, accordingly, only a mission under Major H.B. Lumsden was allowed by mutual agreement to stay in Kandahar.<sup>40</sup>

The Anglo-Persian war came to a close before the

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<sup>37</sup>Sykes, *Persia*, II, pp. 349-351.

<sup>38</sup>Text in Appendix XVI (b).

<sup>39</sup>GG in Council, 18 August 1856.

<sup>40</sup>Vide the Diary of Major H.B. Lumsden, on his mission to Kandahar, entries for 18 April 1857 et seq.

Amir could take any action in furtherance of the obligations of the treaty. The Shah of Persia had already sued for peace after the capture of Bushire at about the same time when the treaty of Peshawar was being negotiated. A treaty was consequently signed between the Shah of Persia and the British Government on March 4, 1857.<sup>41</sup> By the terms of the treaty the Shah agreed to evacuate all parts of Herat and Afghanistan under the occupation of his army and to relinquish all claims of sovereignty over these territories, and further to recognize the independence of all the principalities of Afghanistan including Herat and promised to abstain from interference in their internal affairs. And finally, in case of difference between Persia and Herat or Afghanistan the Shah was bound by the treaty to refer them to the British good offices and not to take up arms unless British mediation failed to have effect. The British on their part undertook to use their best endeavours to compose such differences. And thus the Persians evacuated the city.\* Herat now fell into the hands of a Barakhzai Sirdar, Sultan Ahmad Khan also known as Sultan Jan, a son of Kohendil Khan, nephew and son-in-law of Dost Mohammad. He was appointed the Governor of Herat merely as an agent of the Shah of Persia. The principality of Herat was in this way ruled by the Shah of Persia through this Sirdar even after the Persian army had evacuated the city. It is not easy to understand why the British did not insist on transmitting the province to Dost Mohammad Khan and let it go to Sultan Jan. It seems that the shrewd Persians got the better of the British negotiator. Dost Mohammad had strongly protested against the appointment;<sup>42</sup> but the Governor-General clarified that his Government had no hand in setting up Sultan Ahmad Khan as ruler of Herat.<sup>43</sup>

For the British, the Persian threat had subsided; that was all what they precisely wanted at this point of time.

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<sup>41</sup>Vide Appendix XVI (b).

\*Taylor from Herat to Murray at Tehran, 5 March 1858; and Lumsden's Diary on his mission to Kandahar, 3 September 1857.

<sup>42</sup>Lumsden to G.G., 29 September 1857.

<sup>43</sup>G.G. to Dost Mohammad, 15 September 1858.

They did not seem to be interested as to who ruled Herat and how, so long as it did not, in any way, constitute a danger to their Empire. They were prepared to support Dost Mohammad to the extent of its compatibility with the security of India, and not give countenance to the Amir's expansionist designs which might or might not be in consonance with their ultimate policy objective. They were not inclined to take chances.

## (ii) Friendship with Dost Mohammad (1858-1863)

The impending expiry of the subsidy to Dost Mohammad on September 30, 1858, alongwith the withdrawal of the Lumsden Mission,<sup>44</sup> perplexed the Amir, who evidently desired to retain the subsidy as long as possible. In a communication to the British Government,<sup>45</sup> therefore, Dost Mohammad sought the renewal of the subsidy on the ground that it would be difficult for him to dissolve the troops in the regular army which could not be maintained without the British grants; while their discharge was likely to spread dissatisfaction and uneasiness among his people.<sup>46</sup> And this was likely to disturb the tranquility of his dominions.

As, in the British thinking, the threat to Afghanistan had not yet been completely removed, John Lawrence, while recommending the continuance of the subsidy, apprised his government<sup>47</sup> that if the grant was stopped the Amir would not like the British mission to stay as it would have lost its *raison d'être*.

In the year 1857 when the British had to face the great uprising of the Indian people, they realized the significance of the fact that their Afghan and Persian policies had acted and reacted upon each other. In one respect, however, the British thinking changed: they no longer considered as tenable their former policy of defending India via Persia by making a demonstration in the Persian Gulf; rather, their

<sup>44</sup>Newsletter dated 6 June 1858, (K.P., III).

<sup>45</sup>Dost Mohammad to Chief Commissioner Punjab, 21 July 1858, (K.P. II).

<sup>46</sup>Chief Commissioner of Punjab to Government of India, 26 September 1858

<sup>47</sup>Chief Commissioner to Government of India, 26 September 1858.

policy came to rest on their friendship and active cooperation with the Afghans. This was largely due to their experience during the Mutiny, as well as a reaction to their mistake of the first Afghan War.

While signing the Peshawar Treaty of 1857 Dost Mohammad had exclaimed : 'I have now made an alliance with the British Government and come what may I will keep it till death'. The Amir really kept his words and remained faithful to his commitments even during the most critical period of the great Indian upsurge of 1857. Despite the pressure from several quarters he proved to be the best friend of the British Government.<sup>48</sup> This was the time when he could have most conveniently exploited the situation in his favour. The troops maintained by John Lawrence in the Punjab and used in the suppression of the revolt were mostly Afghans, and a word from Dost Mohammad would have sent the tribes '*pouring down*' into the strategic valleys of Peshawar and Derajat. But that word was not spoken. It was not that the Amir had relinquished his claims to the valley of Peshawar,<sup>49</sup> but in those anxious moments he saved the British from embarrassment. Major H.B. Lumsden had aptly explained this situation :<sup>50</sup>

We ought indeed to be grateful to Providence for having permitted our relations with Afghanistan to be so successfully arranged before the arrival of this crisis, for I am convinced that, had it not been that the minds of the Afghans were in a measure prepared for the Amir's non-interference, he could not have prevented a general rush down the passes, which must have added greatly to our embarrassment at Peshawar and along the Frontier.

In January 1858, Amir Dost Mohammad Khan went to the extent of refusing to receive the Russian envoy Khanikhoff on the receipt of a note from the Governor-General that his reception by the Amir would be treated as a hostile act against Her Majesty's Government.<sup>51</sup> Such was the

<sup>48</sup>Secretary to Chief Commissioner Punjab to Governor-General, 11 December 1857; Lumsden's Diary, April 1858, (K.P. III)

<sup>49</sup>Dost Mohammad to Lawrence, 21 July 1858.

<sup>50</sup>Major Lumsden's Diary from Kandahar, entry for 2 July 1857, (K.P., III).

<sup>51</sup>Entry for the month of January 1858 (K.P. II).

conduct of the most sanguine ruler of Afghanistan, for whom the British had done but little in return.

In spite of what the Amir of Afghanistan thought and did during the Indian turmoil, John Lawrence was greatly disturbed at the possibility of Afghan intervention. He informed Herbert Edwards<sup>52</sup> at Peshawar of his intention of sending all troops from Lahore and Peshawar to the help of the British army in northern India, and to allow Dost Mohammad Khan to occupy the valley of Peshawar on the understanding that if the Amir remained faithful to the British, these territories would be permanently ceded to him. Lawrence was, of course, thinking in terms of his idea of withdrawing the British frontier from the inhospitable foothills back on to the river Indus. Edwards was surprised by this proposal. He wrote back that to cede Peshawar, particularly during the Mutiny when the British authority was being menacingly challenged throughout India, would be catastrophic to the British interests in India and signify the end of the British Raj and was likely to involve not only the loss of Peshawar but eventually perhaps of the whole the India.<sup>53</sup> Edwards threatened to resign rather than to obey such instructions. Lord Canning, the Governor-General, to whom Lawrence appealed, considered the idea highly detrimental to the British Empire, and extended his support to Edwards, which was dramatically expressed in his telegram to Lawrence :<sup>54</sup> 'Hold on to Peshawar to the last'.

By 1858, the British became free from the internal and external troubles which preoccupied them in 1857. The great debate about the frontier policy re-started among the British officers, which was set in motion by Lord Canning's important minute of February 6, 1857.<sup>55</sup> The Governor-

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<sup>52</sup>Secretary of Chief Commissioner of Punjab to G.G., 11 December 1857.

<sup>53</sup>Bosworth Smith, *Lord Lawrence*, II, pp. 137-141; P.E. Roberts, *British India*, pp. 371-2.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup>Cited in Fraser--Tytler, *op. cit.*, p. 126.



General cogently argued against interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. The only possibility on which he could envisage the sending of an army to Afghanistan was to save Herat from Persian aggression, and that too in the interests of the Afghans themselves and with their tacit consent and cooperation. Canning also argued in support of Dost Mohammad's case for absorption of Herat into Afghanistan, which subsequently led the British Government to accept its annexation in 1863.

It appears that the British Government had finally come to the conclusion<sup>56</sup> that the best policy was to leave the Afghans to themselves in their internal affairs. The only thing the British required of the Afghans in return for their financial aid was to resist any external aggression from the north-west, and which served the interests of both the integrity of Afghanistan and the security of India. This policy was in clear recognition of the yeoman services rendered by Dost Mohammad Khan who, as the guardian of Hindu Kush, controlled his turbulent people and safeguarded the British interests in the dark days of 1857. Non-interference in Afghan affairs, both logical and expedient as it then was, became the corner-stone on which the entire edifice of the policy of 'Masterly Inactivity' was built, and which, for a decade was followed by the British rulers of India.

This policy exercised a stabilizing influence upon Afghan affairs. It provided Dost Mohammad time and inclination to tranquilize his people into a comparatively ordered behaviour, as well as to extend his dominions into the remaining portions of Afghanistan. With the annexation of Herat, a few days before his death in 1863, the Amir was able to leave behind a united Afghanistan of his dreams.

However, a slight complication had occurred as a result of Dost Mohammad Khan's designs over Seistan and Herat. The Persian Government through its ambassador in

<sup>56</sup>Vide Canning to Lumsden, (Spring 1857), cited in Fraser-Tytler, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

Constantinople, Mirza Husain wrote a letter to Lord John Russel about the Afghan overtures in Seistan and claimed British intervention under Article 7 of the Treaty of 1857.<sup>57</sup> To this the British Government replied <sup>58</sup> that although she was bound to remove the '*causes of umbrage*' between the two Governments, she did not recognize the Persian claim of sovereignty over Seistan. The British note, however, promised to try to compose the differences between the Persian and the Afghan Governments. Later on, the British Government while permitting their Persian counterpart to make military preparations if there was any danger to the Persian frontiers, at the same time warned them not 'to encroach upon Afghan countries in any case'.<sup>59</sup> The India Office also directed the Governor-General to issue a warning to the Amir of Afghanistan not to encroach upon the Persian territories.<sup>60</sup> This move was, however, delivered when Dost Mohammad had died soon after capturing Herat. As a matter of fact the Governor-General in his heart of hearts wished that the Afghans would capture Herat as the question was a perpetual headache to the British Government.<sup>61</sup>

A united Afghanistan was not only the cherished dream of Amir Dost Mohammad but for Lord Canning and his advisers too it had become the main plank of their policy, which, however, did not originate with them; it was the same policy which some twenty years ago in 1838, Sir Alexander Burnes had advised Lord Auckland to adopt. In a friendly, strong and united Afghanistan, it was visualized, the British would be relieved of the responsibility of meeting a foreign invader either at the threshold of their empire, or on the 'Wuthering Heights' of the Hindu Kush; and further that, such an Afghanistan would in itself serve as a barrier against aggression.

### (iii) Civil War in Afghanistan (1863-69)

Unfortunately, the stability of political conditions

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<sup>57</sup>From Secretary to G/O India, 26 September 1862.

<sup>58</sup>India Office to Government of Persia, 6 October 1862.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 20 March 1863.

<sup>60</sup>Secretary of State to Governor General, 31 August 1862.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*

which Dost Mohammad Khan dedicatedly sought and finally established by 1863 was destined to be jeopardized by his designation of the favourite but junior son, Shere Ali Khan as his successor. The succession was naturally challenged by his two older half-brothers, Afzal Khan and Azim Khan, with the backing of Afzal's illustrious son, Abdur Rahman. When Shere Ali announced his accession, the Governor-General, Lord Elgin, understandably delayed his recognition in view of the impending challenge to the new Amir's position.<sup>62</sup> This attitude of the British Government adversely affected the cause of Shere Ali who was compelled by his brothers to leave his position at Kabul and Kandahar, and to retire to Herat. Between 1863 and 1869 the political situation in Afghanistan remained rather fluid.

During the period of confusion, anarchy and civil war in Afghanistan, the British Government kept itself aloof. Lawrence on whom had fallen the responsibility of dealing with this complex situation, re-enunciated his policy of non-interference and non-involvement in Afghan affairs. The Governor-General was, perhaps, guided by Major H. B. Lumsden's view that the best way to deal with Afghans was to have as little to do with them as possible, and by the advice of Dost Mohammad Khan to *beware of meddling with their internecine quarrels*<sup>63</sup> and also by reading the characteristics of the Afghan people that they were content to cooperate among themselves, to solve their own problems and to defend themselves against external threats.<sup>64</sup> Thus Lawrence was determined not to 'embroil' himself in the dynastic wars of the Afghan princes. When Azim Khan and Abdur Rahman after being defeated by Shere Ali, sought asylum in India on condition that they be allowed to remain near the Afghan border and no restriction be placed on their movement to re-enter Afghanistan as and when they liked

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<sup>62</sup>Sykes, *Afghanistan*, II, p. 72.

<sup>63</sup>W.J. Eastwick, *Lord Lytton and The Afghan War*, p. 13. cited in Singhal, *op. cit.*, p. 8

<sup>64</sup>A. I. G., 28.3.1968, p. 202

the reply of the British Government<sup>65</sup> was that they were:

prepared to receive them ..., provided they (Azim & Abdur Rahman) consent to remain at such places as may be assigned to them, ... and refrain from all intrigues against the Afghan Government (i. e. Shere Ali) while in our territory.

This policy, although in line with seeking stability in Afghanistan was nevertheless partial to Shere Ali Khan who eventually settled himself, while Abdur Rahman took asylum with the Russians in Turkistan, to reappear twelve years after in 1880. While Lawrence continued to follow a policy of *laissez faire*, to recognise the ruler as the Amir who was in *de facto* control of Afghanistan. Explaining his policy, Lawrence wrote to Sir Stafford Northcote:<sup>66</sup>

'I do not think there is much to choose between the two parties in Afghanistan...there is little inducement for interference in favour of any party.'

He pointed out clearly that the British Government would neither give aid to, nor intrigue with either party, until Shere Ali

should resolve on calling in the aid of Persia or Russia and either of these powers should give him material aid, then it will lead us to give assistance to his enemies, the two brothers ..in possession of Candahar and Kaubul.

Lawrence's policy was not a figment of his imagination or deduced logically from his thinking of inactivity; there was concrete evidence to show that Shere Ali Khan had turned down a request from the Amir of Bokhara for help against the encroachments of the Russians as he was fully informed that at that time the British and the Russians were friends of each other and the British Government would not look with equanimity at his squabbling with the Amir of Bokhara against its Russian friend. The Persian

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<sup>65</sup> Azim Khan to Deputy Commissioner Bannu, and Secy. Punjab to Commissioner Bannu, 24 January 1869, Polt. A., No. 6/8; also see *Autobiography of Abdur Rahman, op. cit.*, I, p. 110 et seq.

<sup>66</sup> Vide text in C.H. Philips, *The Evolution of India and Pakistan 1858-1947*, pp. 441-2.

Government also wanted to take advantage of the prevailing disunity in Afghanistan and to bring Herat once more under the sphere of her influence. The Shah of Persia had marched an army from Meshed towards Seistan and had demanded Yakub Khan, the son of Shere Ali and Governor of Herat, to come and pay him respects at Meshed. At that time Shere Ali was in dire need of help against his brothers, Afzal and Azim, and was inclined to order his son to seek Persian help. But a warning from the British Government that it would be construed as a hostile act prevented Shere Ali Khan from doing so.<sup>67</sup>

But those who were concerned over the Russian advances into Central Asia, criticized Lawrence for not taking preventive measures to forestall the Russian moves. Primarily, they thought that the British should strive to bring a stable government in Afghanistan. They advocated that Shere Ali should be secured in the greater interest of India without any delay, and arms, officers, even an auxillary contingent might also be put at his disposal so that the British acquire a dominant position in Kabul and thereby close all avenues of approach against Russia.<sup>68</sup>

The critics of Lawrence were vindicated. Shere Ali, frustrated by the British hesitation, approached the Russian military Government at Turkistan.<sup>69</sup> Lawrence realizing his fault swiftly changed his policy; congratulated Shere Ali, who had captured Kabul once more, and on his request supplied him rupees six lakhs and a quantity of arms and ammunition.<sup>70</sup> Spurred by the British generosity Shere Ali expressed his desire to contract an alliance on the pattern of the Peshawar treaty of 1857. The Governor-General politely refused to do so on the plea that he was not in a position to involve his Government in supporting any contestant in the internal strife of Afghanistan.

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<sup>67</sup>Foreign Pol. Dept., (No. 3). 3 September 1867.

<sup>68</sup>A.I.G., 25 September 1868. Comment on the article by Lepel Griffin concerning Russian march in Central Asia, published in *Fortnightly Review*, July 1868.

<sup>69</sup>A.I.G., 12 June 1868.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 2 June 1869, Grand Duff reported in *Overland Mail*.



The Governor-General, however, reiterated the policy of his Government not to interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and the conflicts ensuing therein until they did not jeopardise the peace of the British frontier or led to the "*formation of engagements*" with other powers dangerous to the independence of Afghanistan, which would eventually prove hazardous to the security of India. The British were not prepared to offer the Amir any obligatory aid or troops for his help; they were only prepared to offer non-recurring aid in accordance with the demands of the particular situation and which was provided in the form of a subsidy.<sup>71</sup> There was, however, a matter of personal likes and dislikes also. There is evidence that when Afzal Khan died as Amir of Kabul, his next brother Azim was proclaimed the Amir of Afghanistan. The British Government did not like him and waited 'for the day when Shere Ali recover Kabul.'<sup>72</sup> As far as the Russian expansion in Central Asia was concerned, Lord Lawrence and his advisers considered them healthier than the congeries of the warring potentates of Central Asia whom they could hardly fathom;<sup>73</sup> they visualized that the rule of Imperial Russia would bring more order in the area than the confusions hitherto obtaining; and this could be better for the security of India. Lawrence's aid to Shere Ali, therefore, was for maintaining law and order in Afghanistan in the interests of stability and security to the British frontiers, rather than to any fear of Russian invasion.<sup>74</sup>

#### (iv) Russian Expansion in Central Asia (1839-69)

British policy was as much influenced by the Russian Expansion in Central Asia, as were the Russian reaction to British occupation of Afghanistan (1839-42), and the intrigues of British agents in Khiva and Bokhara.<sup>75</sup> By 1842, both the British move in Afghanistan and the Russian

<sup>71</sup>Foreign Pol. Dept., No. 230/231, Secretary of State to Governor General, February 1868.

<sup>72</sup>Foreign Pol. Dept., No. 96/101, Polt. A., 25 April 1868.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup>A.I.G., 2 June 1869, pp. 235-237/262-264.

<sup>75</sup>*Moscow Gazette*, 21 February 1869, *vide* S.H. 26/27.

attempt at Khiva had misfired. But these failures did provide an added incentive to the irresistible impulse of imperialist expansion. In 1830, the British frontiers were at the river Sutlej and those of the Russians, who operated from Orenburg, were somewhere between the Caspian and the Aral seas, in the Khirgis steppes—an inhospitable and intractable zone of some fourteen hundred miles separated the British and the Russian possessions. British expansion across the Indus into close proximity with Afghanistan by 1849, was equally matched by Russian movement into Central Asia, towards the borders of Afghanistan.

After the failure of Perovsky's expedition against Khiva in 1839, the Russians changed the base of their operations from Orenburg to the ports on Syr Darya (the Jexartes), which together with the Amu Darya (the Oxus), connected the Aral sea with the downward reaches of inner Asia and to the very threshold of the northern borders of Afghanistan. With one excuse or the other, the Russian march continued. It was gradual but steady. In 1853, General Perovsky, after a great confrontation with the Khan of Khokand took possession of Ak-Masjid, on the downward reaches of Syr Darya, which was renamed Fort Perovsky and that brought under the Russian control an important highway of Central Asia. But the area between Orenburg and the Sea of Aral continued to remain in a state of confusion, and the outbreak of the Crimean War in Europe for a time arrested the Russian advance. After being checked in Europe, the Russian advance began with greater tempo to reach within striking distance of Britain's Indian Empire. The experiences of the Crimean War (1853-57) were carefully assessed by the Government at St. Petersburg. Both the Russian Ministers and Military Generals had reached a consensus that it was well-nigh impossible to challenge the British power which was based on the seas. To effectively countermine it, was to challenge it on its weak and sensitive point on land, and that point was via Afghanistan. This idea was admirably put in the words of the Russian General Skobeloff:

The more powerful Russia becomes in Central Asia,  
the weaker England becomes in India, and consequently the  
more amenable in Europe,

In pursuance of their objective the Russians, therefore, continued their march. Their campaigns shattered the power of Khokand in 1864-65, and the important town and strategic fortress of Chimkent was taken in September 1864 which took the Russian powers to the Tien Shan mountains of western China. The principal town of Tashkent was added to the Russian Empire soon afterwards. These expansions brought the Russians in direct confrontation with the Amir of Bokhara—considered to be the most powerful of the Central Asian potentates. With these successes, the Imperial Government appointed General K.P. Von Kaufman as the Military Governor of Central Asia in 1867 to accelerate the tempo of expansion. Kaufman immediately challenged the power of Bokhara and annexed the ancient city of Samarkand, which was then a great commercial centre of Central Asia. Though the Amir of Bokhara was compelled to become a subsidiary ally of the Tsar, yet the annexation of this principality had to be postponed for several decades.

With the appointment of General Kaufman, all power had passed into the hands of the military generals who were less concerned about the diplomatic niceties going on between St. Petersburg and London, than to promote the extension of Russian influence in Central Asia.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, it took several months before the communications from Tashkent reached St. Petersburg and from there to London and then to Calcutta Council Chamber. For example, the Russian Government informed its British counterpart that General Kaufman was instructed not to embark upon any further conquest in Central Asia.<sup>77</sup> By the time these instructions reached Kaufman and the British Government received an assurance, some such situation developed in Central Asia which compelled the Russian General to adopt punitive measures in order to suppress the Central Asian people or seek recourse to reprisals to annex some more territory.

It is also not quite certain whether the Government at St. Petersburg was not indulging in duplicity—telling its

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<sup>76</sup>Nesselrode to Pozzodi Borgo, 20 October 1838.

<sup>77</sup>Buchanan to Clarendon, 24 March 1869, S.H. No. 30/31,

Generals in Central Asia to go on moving, while informing the British that they had been instructed to stop Russian ingress towards Afghanistan. This became abundantly clear in 1864 when the Russian Imperial Chancellor Gorchakov circulated a memorandum<sup>78</sup> to all the Russian representatives abroad concerning the aims and purposes of the Russian advance in Central Asia. This can be termed as the most remarkable document on the Central Asian question and perhaps one of the most representative manifestos of imperial expansion in the annals of the history of mankind. With slight changes of context, time and emphasis, it could have come from the pen of any progenitor of imperialism. The Gorchakov document succinctly but precisely explained the Russian position in Central Asia, the interest that had prompted their actions and their expansions, and the aims and objects which they were pursuing.

To preserve the logical argument of the memorandum it would be germane to use the language of the document<sup>79</sup> itself :

The position of Russia in Central Asia is that of all civilised states which come into contact with half-savage wandering tribes possessing no fixed social organisation...in such cases the interest of security on the frontier, and of commercial relations, compel the more civilised state to exercise a certain ascendancy over neighbours whose turbulence and nomad instincts render them difficult to live with. First...to reduce the tribes on our frontier to a more or less complete submission...the state is obliged to defend against depredations, and chastise who commit *aggression*...against an enemy whose social organisation enables him to elude pursuit. Retreat is ascribed to weakness for Asiatics respect only visible and palpable force; civilisation has yet no hold on them...But beyond this line there are other tribes which soon provoked the same dangers. The state then finds itself on the horns of a dilemma : *either* abandon the incessant struggle which renders security and civilisation impossible : *or indulge in expensive repression*. Such has been the lot of all countries placed in the same conditions. The United States in America, France in Algiers, Holland in her colonies,

<sup>78</sup>Text in Appendix XVII.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, italics by the author.

England in India all have been inevitably drawn into a course wherein ambition plays a smaller part than imperious necessity, and where the greatest difficulty is in knowing where to stop.

Such are the reasons which have induced the Imperial Government to establish itself--*but the dilemma continues* : it must allow an anarchy to become chronic which paralyses all security and all progress, and involves distant and expensive expeditions at frequent intervals ; or on the other hand it must enter on a career of conquest and annexation such as gave England her Indian Empire.

My august Master's policy,... places his rule on firm foundations, guarantees security and develops social organisation, commerce, well-being and civilisations... that nomad tribes...their low civilisation and nebulous political development... given a more highly developed social organisation, afford for us a basis for friendly relations which may become all that can be wished,

These principles afford a clear natural and logical explanation of the recent military operations accomplished in Central Asia. People of late years have been pleased to credit us with a mission to civilise neighbouring countries on the continent of Asia. The progress of civilisation has no efficacious ally than commercial relations.. in devoting herself to this task the Russian Cabinet has the interest of the Empire in view ; but we believe that its accomplishment will also serve those of civilisation and humanity at large. We have a right to count upon an equitable and loyal appreciation of the policy which we follow, and the principles on which it is framed.

To allay the fears of the British that they have no intention of interfering in the interest of the British Empire or even Afghanistan, the memorandum included a sentence :<sup>80</sup>

This consideration marks the geographical precision, the limits where interest and reason command us to stop, *that is, before the limits of Afghanistan.*

It is, however, in the nature of imperialism that its forward impulse, once set in motion, is well-nigh uncontrollable and particularly when the centre of its control was as remote as St. Petersburg was from Central Asia. And also, in this southward march of Russian 'civilization' there

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<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*



were no obstructions, no impediments, either up to the reaches of the Hindu Kush or even to the shores of the Indian Ocean but one—an upward thrust of some equally powerful empire, challenging and arresting the ‘mighty steam-roller of Russia.’ This was provided in fullest measure by the high tide of British expansion.

An important influence of the rapid Russian expansion and the knowledge of the logic behind it as revealed by the Gorchakov Memorandum, compelled the British empire-builders to have a fresh look at their frontier policy. There had already been developing, since 1850s, two schools of thought with conflicting views concerning the exact limit where the British frontier should be fixed. John Lawrence being the chief exponent of the Punjab or ‘close border’ school pointed out that the Indus being ‘broad, deep and rapid’ could be considered a suitable frontier. His argument was supported by the views of men like Sir James Outram, who held that the natural and impregnable boundary of the Empire was the Indus. Lord Canning was, however, opposed to this as he thought, and rightly perhaps, that a river could not form a good line of defence.<sup>81</sup> Logistics of military expertise would also endorse this contention. But Lawrence did not give up his line.

After having failed to convince his government to ‘go back to the Indus’ he advised them against further advance, on the ground that this might lead to war with the Afghans. No matter who, Russia or Britain, gained precedence in the invasion of Afghanistan, the one to take the lead would be called an ‘invader’ and the other would be hailed as a friend and deliverer by the Afghans. He stressed upon the need of Afghanistan remaining a buffer state, and meeting Russia on the north-west frontier if at all she was inclined to invade India.<sup>82</sup> That Russia had no such inclination was supported by a report in the *Moscow Gazette*:<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup>Dharm Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>82</sup>Lawrence to GG, 21 October 1858; also *vide* Dharm Pal, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>83</sup>February 1869, S.H., Nos. 23-25, 1869.

To think that Russia would ever contemplate the conquest of India is a complete absurdity.

Further, the British Ambassador's talk with the Tsar show that the Russian Government were more alarmed to imagine the consequences of being subjected to a hostile policy on the part of Her Majesty's Government than convinced of their capability to inflict injury to the Government of India.<sup>84</sup>

Lawrence believed that first of all there was no possibility of Russian advance into India. In case Russia invaded India, meeting her on the Oxus would entail British meddling with Afghan affairs and quarrelling with Shere Ali Khan.<sup>85</sup> He was convinced that it would be unwise and impolitic to lessen Russia's difficulties by meeting her half way, in a country unsuited for military operations, and believed that the British Indian Empire would be more secure by 'a compact, highly equipped, and disciplined army stationed within our own territories.'<sup>86</sup> He also stressed the need to be careful about the finances, in short, to make preparations at home. Furthermore, Lawrence urged his government to mutually define in consultation with the Government at St. Petersburg the respective spheres of influence of the two empires. Once this was done, Great Britain would have but little fear from the Tsarist Russia, and then no nation would have any right to object to Russian expansion.<sup>87</sup>

He was, however, not the only one to press the British Government for such a policy in respect of Central Asia. Herbert Edward went to the extent of saying that Britain should welcome Russian civilization in Central Asia and give it its preferment to the '*anarchy of Khiva*, the dark tyranny of Bokhara and the nomad barbarism of Khokand.'<sup>88</sup> With the spread of exaggerated reports about the extent of Russian expansion and the possibility of her seeking inter-

<sup>84</sup> Buchanan to Clarendon, 28 July 1869.

<sup>85</sup> Text in Philips, *op. cit.*, pp. 444-5.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> P. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 409.

vention in the affairs of Afghanistan, it was considered as a signal of alarm in an important section of the British opinion.<sup>89</sup> They charged Lawrence for facilitating the Russian expansion and advocated a firmer policy for the safeguard of the Indian Empire.<sup>90</sup> These critics, nonetheless, failed to visualize the *raison d'être* behind the policy of inactivity which was successively and successfully followed by Elgin, John Lawrence, Mayo and Northbrook.

Of course it was the policy of the Liberal Party of England. We shall see when the Conservatives (Tories) under Lord Salisbury and Lytton tried to reverse it and with what consequences.

Sir John Jacob, the administrator of Sindh, was the founder of the 'Sindh' or 'forward' school of frontier policy. The exponents of this policy were in favour of a 'scientific frontier.' Their main contention was that the frontier running along the foothills, inhabited by the 'wild tribes' was not strategically safe, as it served, in the contemporary world, not as a barrier but as a screen behind which one would hardly know what precisely was going on. The value of the rivers or mountain passes would depend upon the command of these places on either side.

The advocates of this policy, therefore, wanted to move forward and fix the frontier on the Hindu Kush.<sup>91</sup> The policy which had already started taking shape in 1854, was kept alive by its supporter, Sir Bartle Frere and received the needed impetus from Sir Henry Rawlinson's Memorandum of July 20, 1868.<sup>92</sup> Rawlinson, being an outstanding veteran of the first Afghan War and the war with Persia, could sense that the Russian position on the Oxus tended to converge on the northern frontier of Afghanistan challenging and alarming the British in southern Asia. He, therefore, warned his government that Russia had 'advanced to a

<sup>89</sup>M.A. Terentyef, *Russia and England in Central Asia*, (Tr.).

B.C.S Daukes, II, pp, 60-62.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup>Dharm Pal, *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 9-10, 21-22.

<sup>92</sup>Text in Philips, *op. cit.*, pp. 442-4.

point from which retreat is impossible', and it was equally impossible for her to remain passive and not interfere with the independent country of the Afghans, lying in between the valleys of the Indus and the Oxus. He also feared that the Russian advance through Afghanistan was inevitable, if not immediate. It was implied that under such circumstances, if Lord Auckland's policy of establishing a strong and friendly power on the north-west frontier was still valid, then the policy of 'Masterly Inactivity' should be replaced by a more active and positive one, not only in Afghanistan but also in Persia. Sir Henry concluded on a somewhat melodramatic note which seemed to be a perfect reply of the British imperial masters to those of Russia which had induced the Gorchakov Memorandum. Rawlinson wrote :

In the interests,...of peace, ..of commerce,... of moral and material improvement,... interference in Afghanistan has now become a duty, and that any moderate outlay or responsibility we may incur in restoring order at Cabul will prove, in the sequel, to be true economy.

The Government of India, still upholding Lord Lawrence's line of 'Masterly Inactivity', would not come round because it 'would be the cause of grave political and financial embarrassment and would involve in doubtful undertakings;'<sup>93</sup> and which the Government thought would neither be in the interests of internal tranquillity and consolidation of India nor was a better and surer way of meeting Russia. It would be better, the Indian Government advised the Secretary of State, that London Government should deal directly with St. Petersburg to settle the Central Asian issue; while any interference in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan, as advocated by Rawlinson, was strongly opposed. The Government, however, consulted the Home Government to oppose the development of any kind of Russian influence at the Court of Kabul.

Although the Rawlinson Memorandum failed to move Lawrence and Mayo, it remained the foundation on which

<sup>93</sup>The Government of India to the Secretary of State, 4 January 1869, *vide* Philips, *op. cit.*, pp. 444-5.

the entire edifice of the forward policy in 1870s was built up. Lawrence's advice of 'direct diplomacy' between London and St. Petersburg was also taken up; but ironically enough, it got mixed up with forward policy which culminated in the Second Afghan War.

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# 7

## Direct Diplomacy

1869-1876

A buffer state is a technically sovereign state that exists mainly because it serves to lessen friction between its neighbours... It is a political counterpart of an effective barrier boundary...Afghanistan may be cited as an example of this type.

—MARY BARNES GEAR\*

Early in 1869, when Shere Ali Khan re-established his interrupted reign in Afghanistan, he faced at least three important problems: first, he needed help in money and ammunition for the sustenance of his somewhat uncertain rule, and this, he believed, would come only from the British Government, which had already helped him; secondly, taking advantage of the Afghan Civil War, the Persians had annexed to themselves certain Afghan territories of Seistan near the river Helmand which the Afghans wanted to take back; and finally, the Russians by their expansion had reached in a dangerous proximity to Afghanistan's northern borders, and this, to Shere Ali, constituted a menace to the security of Afghanistan. In the last two problems, the British intervened, not so much on the side of

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\**Journal of Geography*, March 1941.

Afghanistan, but to provide security to India against a Russian threat emanating either directly through northern Afghanistan or via Persia. Aid to Shere Ali Khan came handy in the furtherance of the objectives of the British policy.

**(i) Ambala Conference (1869)**

About the same time Lord Lawrence's term as Governor-General of India was expiring. Before leaving India he communicated his views on Afghan policy to the Secretary of State in a letter of January 4, 1869, referred to in the foregoing chapter. The contents of this note which formed the basis of the policy pursued by Lawrence's successor, Lord Mayo, were briefly as follows :

*First*, the Government was advised to start a direct dialogue with the Russian Government with a view to coming to a clear understanding with regard to Central Asia, and also to tell the Government of St. Petersburg that 'it cannot be permitted to interfere in the affairs of Afghanistan or in those of any state which lies contiguous to our frontiers'; *Secondly*, the *de facto* ruler of Kabul may be given such assistance as might be necessary to make him establish his hegemony over his warring and anarchic enemies and also given moral support against external threat, 'but without any formal offensive or defensive alliance'; and finally Amir Shere Ali Khan be extended an invitation for a meeting with the Governor General in person for an exchange of views on matters of mutual interest.

Lawrence was, however, firm that the policy of non-interference must be accepted by the Afghans. He was of the view that the British should try to impress upon Shere Ali Khan to create a pro-British climate of opinion among his people that could completely erase from their minds the memories of the first Afghan War, as well as, to dispel the idea, generated during the Afghan Civil War, that the British might again try to move into Afghanistan. Such a situation, it was visualized, could pave the way for the amicable growth of British-Afghan relations. Even though Shere Ali Khan was not very sure if the British were aggressive in

their intentions but showed signs of apprehensiveness regarding Russian movements in Central Asia which were closing in on the Afghan border. General Kauffman, the Russian Governor General of Central Asia, was also sending friendly letters to the Amir. Later events gave evidence that Shere Ali, like his father Dost Mohammad, wanted to use the Russian approaches as a means to gain British help and support not only for Afghanistan, but also for the preservation of his own shaky rule.

The advice of Lawrence was accepted by the British Government and Lord Mayo was briefed to act in accordance with the instructions of the great 'Pacificator'. In the meantime, Shere Ali also established his position with the British subsistence and was able to accept Lord Mayo's invitation for a meeting at Ambala in March 1869. The Amir was delighted by the friendliness of his reception and greatly impressed by the might of the British Empire. He also showed his gratefulness for the help of the Governor-General in the consolidation of his rule and now wanted that the British should subsidise him to maintain the integrity of his kingdom and also to contract an alliance between the two states which could afford him stability at home and security from foreign aggressions. In brief the Amir wanted the British government not to acknowledge 'any friend in the whole of Afghanistan save the Amir and his descendents;' and for that purpose he wanted his favourite son Abdullah Jan to be acknowledged as his only legal heir.

Lord Mayo although bound by Lawrence's policy could not promise all that, but was also not in a position to annoy the Amir in a way to throw him into the arms of the Russians. He showed utmost goodwill, amity, and moral support of the British Government for the Amir but politely declined to enter into any definite treaty relations or to offer any promise of regular, permanent subsidy, but provided the Amir with some help in money and arms and promised aid and support in case of internal or external emergency. Whether there existed an emergency was, however, subject to British interpretation. Instead of a formal treaty or

commitment, Lord Mayo provided Shere Ali Khan with a letter of assurances:<sup>1</sup>

Considering that the bond of friendship had lately been more closely drawn than heretofore it (the British Government) will view with severe displeasure any attempt on the part of your rivals to disturb your position as ruler of Cabul and rekindle civil war and it will further endeavour, from time to time, by such means as circumstances may require to strengthen the Government of your Highness... to establish your legitimate rule over your entire kingdom, to consolidate your power, to create firm and merciful administration in every province of Afghanistan, to promote the interest of commerce, and to secure peace and tranquillity within all your orders.

Shere Ali did not get all he had asked for; perhaps he gained very little, and his request for the treaty of alliance as well as his desire in respect of his favourite son Abdullah Jan were not agreed to. But the friendly and persuasive attitude of Lord Mayo and his obvious sincerity compensated, to a large extent, the disagreeableness of the denial. Shere Ali returned disappointed but not dissatisfied or disillusioned. Perhaps the Amir was even contented. He seems to have been satisfied with the outcome of the meeting to the extent that it opened a way for further negotiations. It seems that at that time Shere Ali was very much scared of the Russian moves and thought it in his own interest to work in harmony and friendship with the British. While the British thought that the personal equation established with the Afghans would be of help in future.

With the Russian movements in Central Asia, there had developed a lobby in England which would be termed as India-in-danger-lobby. It was circulated that Mayo had committed to Shere Ali the use of British troops to consolidate the Amir's rule over the entire Afghanistan. Lord Lawrence refuted this outcry in the House of Lords,<sup>2</sup> while Mayo assured the Government through his dispatch of July 1, 1869 that he had only offered;

warm countenance and support, discouragement of his rivals, such material assistance as we may deem absolutely necessary

<sup>1</sup>Viceroy to the Amir, 31 March 1869.

<sup>2</sup>A.I.G., 2 June 1869, pp. 235-237. This contains besides other reports, one by Grand Duff in *Overland Mail & Indian Public Opinion*.

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for his immediate wants, constant and friendly communication through the Commissioner of Peshawar and a native agent at Kabul; he on his part undertaking to do all he can to maintain peace over frontier and comply with all wishes in the matter of trade.

Thus Lawrence's policy of non-interference in Afghan affairs proved to be a useful one so long as the Amir remained friendly to the British, and did not solicit closer relations with Russia. But it needed an iron nerve and much confidence to remain untroubled in India not knowing when the Russians might move or 'what devil's cauldron might be brewing behind the mountains of Hindu Kush.'<sup>3</sup> The issues of the policy of masterly inactivity were too difficult and too delicate, there were so many facts which might destroy their equilibrium, and there were no means of restoring the balance once this was upset.

## **(ii) Perso-Afghan Dispute over Seistan (1869-73)**

Taking advantage of the uncertain conditions in Afghanistan (1863-69) Persia had not only taken possession of Seistan which had formed part of Afghanistan, but had also encroached upon the territories of the Khan of Kalat and Beluchistan, which were directly under the British hegemony. But here we are only concerned with the Afghan-Persian dispute.

Amir Shere Ali Khan, after consolidating his hold over Kandahar and Herat and establishing a rapport with Lord Mayo, strongly protested against the Persian occupation. The British Government while concluding the treaty of Paris with Persia in March 1857, had entered into a stipulation, without the knowledge of the Afgans, to adjust disputes arising out between Persia and Afghanistan and to prevent any 'cause of umbrage' between the two; furthermore, the British Government undertook to 'use their best endeavours to compose such differences' between the two countries.<sup>4</sup> But the treaties which the British concluded with the Amir of Afghanistan in 1855 and 1857 contained no such provision. In 1863, when

<sup>3</sup>John Dacosta, *Scientific Frontier*, or the Danger of Russian invasion of India.

<sup>4</sup>*Vide* Appendix XV (b), Art. 6, paras 3 & 4.

the Persian Government approached the British for arbitration over the Seistan dispute, the British were at that time so much in the grip of the principle of non-interference followed by John Lawrence, the Governor-General of India, that Foreign Secretary Lord Russel sent a strange reply to the Persian request :<sup>5</sup>

Her Majesty's Government, being informed that the title of territory of Seistan is disputed between Persia and Afghanistan, must decline to interfere in the matter, and leave it to both parties to make good their possessions by force of arms.

Afghanistan in disarray, Persia quietly followed Russel's advice and annexed Seistan. After the emergence of Shere Ali from the heroes of Civil War, there arose a great resentment among the people of Afghanistan against the Persian appropriation of Afghanistan's strategic area. Shere Ali was in a mood to pay the Persians back in the same coin and was prepared to take back the territory by force of arms; it would have happened, had not the Amir been restrained by personal advice and influence of the Governor-General of India. Now the Persians also became apprehensive of the hostile postures of the Afghans and decided to employ the good offices of the British Government. The British also did not want war between the two countries for the contested area was located on the strategic Indian border. The Government of India, however, refused to consider the Persian contention regarding Lord Russel's dispatch, but were ready to invoke article VI of Anglo-Persian treaty of 1857 by inducing the Afghan Amir through friendly persuasion, as he was not a party to the treaty, to accept any such arbitration. The Persians acquiesced and General Goldsmid was appointed to arbitrate, assisted by the Persian and Afghan Commissioners. The whole of Seistan was to be the subject of the arbitration, Afghanistan had accepted it as a gesture of goodwill to the Government of India. General Goldsmid was to lay down the two lines of frontier which would have to be respectively assigned to Persia and Afghanistan if the claims of one party or the other were admitted to their full extent. He was to record evidence on the spot as regards

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<sup>5</sup>Cited in Bisheshwar Prasad, *the Foundations of India's Foreign Policy*.

ancient rights and actual possessions. The arbitration tried to work on absolute justice and impartiality and attempted to be fair to both parties with the result that the middle line was considered to be the best solution. But it failed to satisfy both Afghanistan and Persia : Persia was reluctant to yield the territory it had acquired : while Afghanistan strongly protested against half of their land being given to the aggressor.<sup>6</sup> The British Government was also not happy with the award as it failed to keep both Persia and Afghanistan friendly to them as bastions of India's defence against future aggression of Russia, and keep these two countries away from landing into the Russian camp. Both the dispute and the award aggravated the problem of the British defence, rather than solving it.

### iii) Direct Diplomacy and the Russo-Afghan Border (1869-73)

It is, perhaps, erroneous to assume that John Lawrence's policy was responsible for encouraging the Russian expansion in Central Asia. What he precisely had sought for was the desirability of establishing a frank and clear understanding with the Court of St. Petersburg as to its project and designs in Central Asia; and that the Russians might be given to understand, in firm but courteous language, that they could not be permitted to interfere in the affairs of Afghanistan, or in those of any state contiguous to the British frontier.<sup>7</sup> On another occasion, Lawrence was more explicit, and the language of his advice to the Secretary of State<sup>8</sup> was so firm, even bellicose, that it could not be alluded to as of passive inactivity :

...to endeavour to come to some mutual understanding with Russia, and failing that, we might give that power to understand that an advance towards India beyond a certain point would entail war in all parts of the world with England.

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<sup>6</sup>Shere Ali and his Ministers were greatly annoyed and had to be appeased by the British by a compensation of Rupees five lakhs, see for details, *Rishtia, op. cit.*, Chap. 29

<sup>7</sup>To Secretary of State, 4 January 1869, text in Philips, *op. cit.*, pp. 444-5.

<sup>8</sup>Minute of 25 November 1868, quoted in Bisheshwar Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

As it seems today, the underlying aim behind his policy was to protect British interests; and those interests, he believed, could be better served by not meddling in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan and keeping the Amir friendly by providing him assistance as and when the British deemed it necessary.

Lawrence was convinced that it was equally hazardous militarily and unfeasible politically, for Russia, as for Britain, and perhaps more so in the case of Russia, to actively intervene in Afghanistan with a view to endangering the security of the British Indian Empire. He believed that the British interests could easily be protected by befriending Afghanistan and making it a bulwark against Russian invasion, than in following a policy both spirited and forward by trying to check Russian ingress at the Oxus. Moreover, the latter course would have been costly and the Indian treasury could have ill-afforded to provide finances for such a venture. He had also reports and estimates to support the contention that the Russian Empire at that time could neither financially nor militarily dream of embarking upon an invasion and conquest of India.<sup>9</sup> Even if the Russian could have any such inclination and capability, the utmost they could have done, as they ultimately did, was to threaten or seem to threaten Afghanistan and thereby to gain diplomatically from Britain in European politics. In brief, Russian expansion and diplomacy in Asia were means to subserve her European ends.

Perhaps, with this background in mind, Lawrence advised the Home Government to deal directly with the government at St. Petersburg so as to arrive at an understanding concerning Central Asia. In fact direct negotiations between England and Russia had started as early as 1837, when, before the siege of Herat, the British agents were exploring the principalities of Central Asia followed by those of the Russians. The suspicion of both the powers was increasing : the growing trade of Great Britain with Afghanistan, Persia and Central Asia seemed to threaten

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<sup>9</sup>*Vide* A.I.G., 25.5.1866, 23.3.1868, 25.9.1868.



the Russian interests, and, therefore, the Russians started to use the same methods as those of the British—winning of friends and influencing people through the despatch of agents, making of treaties and the payment of money to the feudal potentates of the regions.

A chapter of direct diplomacy between the two mighty empires began when Count Nesselrode replied to Lord Palmerston's objection over the activities of the Russian agents in Persia and Afghanistan. The reply of Nesselrode explained the Russian position in a plain and straight-forward manner:<sup>10</sup>

Whilst on our part we ask nothing but to be admitted to partake, in fair competition, the commercial advantage of Asia,.....avoiding the occurrence of a general conflagration in that vast portion of the globe.....respect the independence of the immediate countries which separate us...in order to prevent the possibility of a conflict.

Alongwith this notice the Government at St. Petersburg issued instructions<sup>11</sup> to its ambassador at Tehran :

not to maintain with Afghanistan any other than purely commercial relations...and that Russia...not to take any part in the Civil Wars of the Afghan Chiefs...which have no claim to our (Russian) intervention.

In spite of these protestations the two powers remained suspicious of each other. At one moment, when Lord Auckland's war on Afghanistan (1839-1842) was going on and General Perofski's advance on Khiva (1839-40) was also in process, Baron Brunnow, Russian Ambassador in London, is said to have remarked to Hobhouse that the Sepoy and the Cossack were about to meet on the banks of the Oxus. This expected meeting could not take place because of the failure of the Khivan expedition, as well as the British reverses in Afghanistan at about the same time. From then onwards the relations between Britain and Russia remained in a state of suspended animation till the 1860s, when the Central Asia question was once more revived.

As described earlier, the Russian expansion in Central

<sup>10</sup>Nesselrode to Palmerston, December 1838.

<sup>11</sup>Nesselrode to Pozzo di Borgo, 5 March 1839,

Asia was resumed in the 1860s. In 1864, the Russian authority was extended to the borders of Khokand, Bokhara and Khiva; the new province of Turkestan was created in 1867, and Bokhara was made a 'subsidiary ally' of the Tsar. Samarkand, which was previously occupied only temporarily, was finally absorbed into the Russian Empire in 1868. These developments were sufficiently grave for the British Government and the people alike. Their concern for the security of the Indian Empire was particularly aroused as the situation with regard to Afghanistan was rendered especially delicate by reason of its uncertain boundaries. As already mentioned, there were two schools of thought concerning the method by which the Russian challenge was to be met: the one led by Sir Henry Rawlinson advocated a forward policy of meeting the Russians on the Oxus, which was not considered feasible then; while the other, prescribed by Sir John Lawrence, of entering into direct negotiations with Russia for the purpose of defining the British and the Russian spheres of influence in Central Asia, was taken up by the London Government, and which continued for nearly forty years.

To Lawrence and his fellow travellers, the Russian expansion was considered to have a more civilizing effect on these Asian people,<sup>12</sup> and was considered to be more stable for the British to deal with on the pattern of European politics. They did not fear a Russian invasion of India or Afghanistan, while some of them believed that the world was wide enough for both the British and the Russians to expand, to exist and prosper;<sup>13</sup> they might be enemies in Europe and at the same time could be friends in Asia in pursuance of their mutual and respective interests. Lord Mayo, the Governor General of India between March 1869 and February 1872, like his predecessor Lord Lawrence, was no Russophobe. He thought that Russia was perhaps not aware of the British power, if a Russian invasion of India was being contemplated. He was certain that the British power in the East was well entrenched, 'compact and strong', while that of Russia

<sup>12</sup>A.I.G., 19 October 1866.

<sup>13</sup>A.I.G., 19 July 1867.

in Central Asia had to achieve that accession to strength in order to be in a position to threaten the British in India. Mayo also favoured a dialogue with Russia.

After carefully weighing the pros and cons of the various alternatives, the London Government decided to open negotiations with the Government at St. Petersburg. Early in the year 1869, Lord Clarendon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the Gladstone Cabinet, while discussing the Central Asian question with Baron Brunnow, the Russian Ambassador, suggested the 'recognition of some territory as neutral between the possessions of England and Russia which should be the limit of those possessions and be scrupulously respected by both powers.<sup>14</sup> The Russian Ambassador gave positive indication that his government would treat Afghanistan as entirely beyond the sphere of Russian influence. The question was also discussed in detail in a *tete-a-tete* between Lord Clarendon and Chancellor Gorchakov at Heidelberg in September 1869. Clarendon suggested the Oxus as the most desirable lines of demarcation for a neutral place between the Russian and the British spheres of influence. Gorchakov objected to it on the ground that since a portion of the territory south of the Oxus was claimed by the ruler of Bokhara, its inclusion in the British sphere, i.e., as part of Afghanistan, might become the cause of friction between Great Britain and Russia. He alternately suggested Afghanistan to be the neutral zone.<sup>15</sup> Lord Mayo strongly objected to the suggestions of making Afghanistan as the neutral territory as it would be inimical to the defence of India. The Governor General emphasized that the security of India was based on a strong, united and friendly Afghanistan, and not on Russia having equal status with Britain at the court of Kabul.<sup>16</sup>

Accordingly, Clarendon told Gorchakov the inability of his government to accept Afghanistan as a neutral zone

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<sup>14</sup>Clarendon to Buchanan, 27 March 1869.

<sup>15</sup>Clarendon to Buchanan, 3 September 1869.

<sup>16</sup>Mayo to Clarendon, 3 June 1869.

because of its uncertain frontiers and the inclination of Amir Shere Ali to bring under his own subjection the different Khanates which had formerly belonged to Afghanistan and which were considered by Russia to be independent. Gorchakov replied that the Amir was at perfect liberty to expand his dominions which formerly belonged to Afghanistan, but he must not come into collision with the Amir of Bokhara or commit acts which might be interpreted as hostile to the interests of the Russian Empire.<sup>17</sup> The British on the other hand, promised to dissuade Shere Ali Khan from any attempt to extend the limit of the kingdom held by Dost Mohammad Khan, and also to avoid all risks of friction with Russia or Bokhara.<sup>18</sup> Gorchakov, on his side, promised to use his government's influence to restrain the Amir of Bokhara from transgressing the limits of the Afghan territory.<sup>19</sup> It was also diplomatically implied from the negotiations that the British aid to Shere Ali was not against the interests of Russia, nor Russian advance in Central Asia directed against the British.

On the one hand, the British were having an understanding with Russia in regard to the preservation of the integrity of Afghanistan and a sort of commitment that Afghanistan was outside the pale of Russian influence; on the other hand, General Kaufmann, Governor of Russian Turkestan, had begun a correspondence with Shere Ali Khan which had caused embarrassment to both the Amir and Lord Mayo alike. Though the letters did not contain anything politically significant and were merely complimentary,<sup>20</sup> yet the Governor-General of India took an unusual step in despatching Mr Douglas Forsyth, an official of the Indian Administration, for thrashing out with Russian authorities the entire problem, in addition to and irrespective of what the London Government was doing in the matter.

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<sup>17</sup>Clarendon to Buchanan, 3 September 1869.

<sup>18</sup>Clarendon to Mayo (Telegram), 4 June 1869, S.I., 1869, Nos. 68/74.

<sup>19</sup>Clarendon-Gorchakov conversations at Heidelberg, 3 September 1869, S.H., 1869, Nos. 94/95-Report.

<sup>20</sup>P. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 415.



The conversations at the Russian capital converged on two essential points : the idea of the neutral zone and the exact limits of the frontiers of Afghanistan. Stremoukoff, in-charge of the Asiatic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was of the opinion that the neutral zone includes such areas as Balkh, Kunduz and Badakshan; but realizing that these territories had since become incorporated in the dominions of Shere Ali Khan, changed his stand and once more asserted that the entire Afghanistan under the possessions of the Amir of Kabul be accepted as the neutral zone.<sup>21</sup> If this could be accepted by the British, the Russians showed their readiness not to interfere, nor seek to exercise any influence beyond the limits of the neutral zone. But the British wanted Afghanistan to be considered as exclusively within their own sphere of influence and desired the neutral zone to be located beyond the northern borders of Afghanistan, somewhere on the upper reaches of the Oxus. Making Afghanistan as the neutral zone was also not in consonance with the British policy of creating on the Indian frontiers '*a series of influenced, but not tributary or neutralised states*'.<sup>22</sup>...Perhaps, because of the strong opposition of Mayo, and formal rejection by Clarendon of Afghanistan as a neutral zone, the entire idea was dropped. Thus the negotiations which began with the aim of creating a 'buffer state' ended up in the discussions pertaining to the spheres of influence.

When the Russians declared that Afghanistan was beyond their sphere of influence, the question arose to delimit the northern frontiers of Afghanistan. Lord Mayo, in his despatch of May 20, 1870 indicated the limits of those territories which acknowledged the sovereignty of Dost Mohammad Khan and were at that time within the dominions of Shere Ali. The Viceroy's suggestion led to the Anglo-Russian measures taken to ascertain such limits. To the Indian Government the northern boundary of Afghanistan was marked by the course of the Oxus River from the

<sup>21</sup>Forsyth to Buchanan, 2 November 1869.

<sup>22</sup>Cited in Bisheshwar Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 46.



district of Balkh on the west to the extreme east of Badakshan. This claim was based on the fact that the territories lying between the Oxus and the Hindukush which were included in the dominions of Dost Mohammad, had since come under the sovereignty of Amir Shere Ali. In brief the British considered the north-western boundary of Shere Ali's dominions which ran in a south-western direction from a point on the Oxus between Khojah Saleh and Kerki, 'skirting and including the provinces of Balkh, Maimana with its dependencies of Andkoi, etc....'<sup>23</sup> and Herat with its dependencies between the valleys of Murghab and Heri Rud. The northern boundary was considered to be the Oxus from the same point between Kerki and Khojah Saleh eastward to Punjab river valley and Wakhan, and thereafter the stream which passes Wakhan up to the point where the range of the Hindukush meets the southern angle of the Pamirs.<sup>24</sup>

Stremoukoff accepted the boundaries as generally indicated in the Viceroy's statement, but expressed doubt as to the point from which the boundary line should commence on the Oxus, since Khojah Saleh was represented on the Russian maps to be itself the western limit of Afghan-Turkestan on the Oxus.<sup>25</sup> He requested that a copy of the dispatch be communicated to the Russian Cabinet so that it could be forwarded to General Kaufmann, Governor-General of Turkestan, for examination, verification and report of the extent of Amir Shere Ali's possessions, as detailed by the note of the British Government. Buchanan at first declined to comply with the request, but later did so on receiving permission from Lord Granville, who had succeeded Lord Clarendon as the Foreign Secretary.<sup>26</sup> As to the objection in regard to Khojah Saleh, the British Government agreed not to object to a re-definition of frontier 'by which the right of Bokhara should be determined to commence at a point upon the left bank of the Oxus immediately

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<sup>23</sup>Mayo to Argyll, 20 May 1870.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>Buchanan to Granville, 13 July 1870.

<sup>26</sup>Granville to Buchanan, 21 July 1871.

below that place.’<sup>27</sup> Stremoukoff believed that no objection would be raised to the inclusion of Khojah Saleh within the Afghan frontier, but he added that great care must be exercised ‘in tracing a line from thence to the south, as Merv and the country of the Turkomans were becoming commercially important.’<sup>28</sup>

On June 21, 1871, Granville instructed Buchanan again to explore the Russian Government concerning the Afghan boundary question and obtain, if possible, General Kaufmann’s opinion relating to the matters referred to him.<sup>29</sup> No answer had been received from Kaufmann. The delay was to be accounted for, it was explained, not only by the great distance of Tashkent from St. Petersburg, but also by the fact that M. Struve, Diplomatic Agent of the Russian Foreign Office attached to the Governor-Generalship, was at the time on a mission to Bokhara.<sup>30</sup> It was promised by the Russian Cabinet that the matter would be brought again to the attention of Kaufmann, with a request for an early statement from him concerning the questions involved.

By the end of year 1871, shortly before relinquishing his post at St. Petersburg, Buchanan once more broached the Afghan frontier question and in response Gorchakov stated that the territory in the actual possession of Shere Ali at that point of time should be considered the limits of Afghanistan; beyond such limits the Amir should be dissuaded by the British from attempting to exercise any influence or interference, while the Russian Government assumed a parallel responsibility of restraining the Amir of Bokhara.<sup>31</sup>

The Russian recalcitrance to agree with the British for a defined and mutually agreed frontier of Afghanistan, seemed to have exhausted British patience; the Russians continuously avoided defining the Afghan frontier as the British wanted. Kaufmann had not sent the long expected

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<sup>27</sup>Buchanan to Granville, 18 August 1870.

<sup>28</sup>Buchanan to Granville, 21 September 1870.

<sup>29</sup>Granville, to Buchanan, 21 June 1871.

<sup>30</sup>Buchanan to Granville, 28 June 1871.

<sup>31</sup>Loftus, *Diplomatic Reminiscences*, II, p. 282.

report of his Government; which he was instructed to draw up on the British suggestions regarding the northern limits of Afghanistan. To solve the jig-saw puzzle of Central Asia, the decision of the British Government was in the form of a unilateral declaration of the limits of Amir Shere Ali's dominions and thus present the Russians a *fait accompli*. The British had been for long known to react against the Russian initiatives in Central Asia; for once they decided to act and let the Russians react to their proposals. One important and obvious consideration which weighed in favour of British action was that they had read in the Russian dilly-dallying the latent desire of the Tsar's Government to keep the frontiers undefined and extend Russian influence farther.

Accordingly the British Ambassador communicated to the Russian Government the decision of the British Foreign Office,<sup>32</sup> in which Lord Granville indicated what were considered by his government to constitute the 'territories and boundaries' fully belonging to the Amir of Kabul :

- (1) Badakshan, with the dependent district of Wakhan from the Sari Kal on the east to the junction of Kokcha River with the Oxus (or Punjab), forming the northern boundary of this province throughout its entire extent;
- (2) Afghan—Turkestan comprising the districts of Kunduz, Khulm and Balkh, the northern boundary of which would be the line of Oxus from the junction of the Kokcha River to the post of Khojah Saleh inclusive on high road from Bokhara to Balkh;
- (3) The internal districts of Akcha, Siripool, Maimna, Shibbergan and Andkoi, the latter of which would be the extreme Afghan frontier possession to the north-west, the desert beyond belonging to independent tribes of Turcomans;
- (4) The western Afghan frontier between the dependencies of Herat and those of the Persian province of Khorasan is wellknown and need not here be defined.

The British Foreign Secretary declared in unequivocal terms that the stated territories by right and occupation

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<sup>32</sup>Granville to Loftus, 17 October 1872.

belonged to Amir Shere Ali Khan who possessed the natural right to defend those territories if invaded; while, on the other hand, the Government of India was instructed to strongly remonstrate with the Amir if the latter evinced any disposition to transgress these limits. It was left to the Russian Government to explicitly recognize this frontier and see it respected by the people amenable to Russian influence.<sup>33</sup>

The unilateral declaration, proved to be a British Monroe Doctrine for Afghanistan. The Russians did not accept it immediately, but finally they did. After a lot of manoeuvring to meet the diplomatic offensive launched by Lord Granville, a special mission under Count Schouvaloff was despatched to London. The British were very sensitive at this time concerning Russia's advance in Central Asia, of her dilatory diplomacy in connection with the Afghan question, and the rumour of her invasion of Khiva. Schouvaloff was entrusted to mollify and reassure the British Government concerning these matters. During the conversation with Lord Granville, the Russian expressed great surprise.<sup>34</sup>

that a certain amount of excitement and susceptibility had been caused in the English public mind...on account of the question of Central Asia.

To Count Schouvaloff the only essential point of difference between the British and the Russians regarding the Afghan question was concerning Badakshan and Wakhan, which the British believed, 'historical facts proved' were under the domination of the sovereign of Cabul...<sup>35</sup>

Prince Gorchakov, while replying to Granville's communication of October 17 not only expressed his government's reservation in regard to Badakshan and Wakhan, but also raised the already shelved question of neutral zone/buffer state and referred to it as 'Intermediate zone' and once

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup>Granville to Loftus, 8 January 1873.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

more suggested that Afghanistan seemed well fitted to supply what was needed.<sup>36</sup>

Lord Granville, however, in his letter to Lord Loftus<sup>37</sup> British Ambassador at St. Petersburg, dealt only with the Russian reservations pertaining to Badakshan and Wakhan. He stated that the reason why the Russians questioned Shere Ali's sovereignty over Badakshan and its dependencies was that after receiving submission of the Chiefs and people of that province, the Amir had experimentally appointed a local governor and had consented to receive from him a fixed amount of revenue from the province. The Amir had reserved the right to eventually subject Badakshan under the direct control of his Government. This arrangement, the like of which had been experimented both by the British and the Russians in their expansive march in Asia, and therefore could not be construed as the negation of the Amir's sovereignty, but to the contrary. With regard to the fear of the Russian Government that the acceptance of Shere Ali's sovereignty over the questioned areas might lead the Amir of Kabul to disturb the peace of Central Asia, that is, he might be tempted to encroach upon the territories under the influence of Russia, the British Foreign Secretary promised to use his Government's influence over the Amir, which had successfully worked till then, of dissuading him from any untoward aggression. Lord Granville cautioned the Russian Government that if the Amir's sovereignty over Badakshan was not recognized there was more likelihood of disturbance of peace in Central Asia, as in that case 'the Amir might be tempted to assert his claims by arms' and the Amir of Bokhara doing the same.

And finally, Lord Granville exhorted the Imperial Government to recognize Shere Ali's rights, as stated in his dispatch of October 17, 1872, as only such recognition could put an end.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Gorchakov to Brunnow, 7 December 1872.

<sup>37</sup>*Vide* Appendix XVIII, dated 24 January 1873.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*



to the wild speculations, so calculated to distract the minds of the Asiatic races, that there is some marked disagreement between England and Russia, on which they may build hopes of carrying out their border feuds for purposes of self-aggrandisement.

Seemingly there were two ideas underlying Russian hesitation and caution in accepting the British suggested boundary of Afghanistan and the Russian insistence on a 'neutral zone' : *Firstly*, behind the mask of undefined boundaries and somewhat vague neutral zone, the Russians wanted to expand; *secondly*, a stable Afghanistan under the British influence with well-defined boundaries guaranteed by both the British and the Russian governments was considered by the Russians as inimical not only to the further expansion of the Russian Empire but to the very consolidation of her present possessions in Central Asia.<sup>39</sup>

The Indian Government was continually pressing the London Government to take a firm attitude towards the security and recognition of the Afghan frontiers as the bastion of Indian defence. They were insisting that the Russians should be apprised of the fact that the integrity of Afghanistan was of prime concern to the British Government and that they would be obliged to assist Shere Ali Khan under certain contingencies.<sup>40</sup>

The unilateral declaration by Granville and the subsequent, sometime friendly, sometime acrimonious, correspondence that followed between London and St. Petersburg, led to the agreement of 1873. The agreement settled two things : the northern frontiers of Afghanistan were accepted but were not delimited on the spot; secondly Russia gave a positive commitment that Afghanistan lay wholly outside the sphere of her influence<sup>41</sup>—a commitment which was invoked by the British with intermittance and which the Russian Government consistently accepted. The direct correspondence between London and St. Petersburg, however' conti-

<sup>39</sup>Memoranda by Robert Michell, S- I., Nos. 130/33, May 1873.

<sup>40</sup>Government of India to Secretary of State, No. 366, cited in Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 46,

<sup>41</sup>Gorchakov to Brunnow, 31 January 1873 : Sykes, *Afghanistan*, II, p. 88.

nued. The British were eager to see the Afghan boundaries properly delimited not only in the north, but also in the west with Persia as well as with India in the East and the South east.

#### (iv) Simla Conference and After

By 1873, Lord Mayo, the architect of Indo-Afghan amity and the initiator of the Seistan Boundary Commission as well as the direct dialogue with Russia concerning the northern border of Afghanistan, was no longer on the scene, having been assassinated by an Afghan convict in February 1872, on the Andaman Island. His successor, Lord Northbrook, could neither maintain with the Afghan Amir the personal equation of his predecessor, nor clear he re-establish a rapport with Shere Ali Khan due to the vacillating policy of the London Government. Moreover, Northbrook had also the awkward privilege of conveying to the Amir the award of the Seistan Boundary Commission, and the transactions relating to the Russo-Afghan border.

The publication of the Seistan boundary award proved to be a great source of resentment for Amir Shere Ali Khan and his people. Northbrook, who was inclined to keep Afghanistan friendly, considered it advisable to meet the Amir personally to remove misunderstanding between the two governments as the Amir was heard to be not willing to abide by the award. The Governor-General requested Shere Ali to receive a British agent in Kabul, Jalalabad or Kandahar. By then the Amir had become fully conscious of the importance of his country in the Anglo-Russian war of nerves. He wanted to improve his bargaining position to gain certain advantages. He wanted a firm commitment from the British in the form of an alliance to defend his kingdom not only against external threats emanating from either Russia or Persia, but also the acknowledgement of his favourite son Abdullah Jan as heir-apparent in preference to the worthier elder son Yakub. With all this, Shere Ali wanted equality and reciprocity of engagements. He turned down the Viceroy's invitation and instead, consented to send his Prime

Minister, Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah, to deal with Lord Northbrook at Simla.<sup>42</sup>

Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah was also the Afghan representative to the Seistan Boundary Commission in which the Afghans had fully cooperated with General Goldsmid, while the Persians not only refused permission to enquire into the Persian side of the disputed territory, but had also shown scant respect to the General. By the proceedings, the Afghans expected an award in their favour, but were extremely disappointed when the award went against them and in favour of Persia.<sup>43</sup> Shere Ali, therefore, wanted to extract a heavy price from the British for accepting the Award. By this experience he had realized that a soft attitude towards the British would not pay: the Amir decided to be tough.

At Simla, the negotiations began acrimoniously and eventually proved abortive. Beside other things, the Afghan Envoy pointed out the possible danger to Indian security via that portion of Seistan which was given over to Persia by the Goldsmid Award, as there was a direct road from Merv in Central Asia through Seistan, from where the Indian border was very close. Secondly, as regard to the northern border, the Anglo-Russian transactions were considered satisfactory, but at the same time, from Khojah Saleh to Heri Rud where the delimitation was indefinite and there was room for the Russians to manoeuvre to create trouble and friction with Afghanistan, as the Russians were slowly but steadily continuing their march towards the Afghan frontier were actually closing in on Merv. Shere Ali was not ready to rely on Russian promises. He might have deduced this conclusion from the words of Prince Gorchakov that a strong civilized power could hardly ever long maintain a

<sup>42</sup>Amir to Viceroy, 22 May 1873.

<sup>43</sup>At the death of Dost Mohammad Khan in 1863, the entire disputed area of Seistan was with Afghanistan. During the ensuing Civil War (1863-69) Persia had occupied it. Under Goldsmid Award the proper Seistan went to Persia, while the outer Seistan to Afghanistan. For further details see section 2 of this Chapter.

stationary boundary line with loosely organised and semi-civilised peoples.<sup>44</sup> As to whether Shere Ali's attitude was actually a reaction to the Seistan Award, or was he really alarmed by the Russian advance in Central Asia, or was he instigated by General Kaufmann, through a continuous flood of correspondence, to pressurise the Government of India, the Amir's stand seems just and comprehensible.

It would be interesting to conjecture as to what Amir Shere Ali might have been thinking at this time. Surely he must be saying to himself: the English are a strange nation, they think it is within their purview to barter away his territory to Persia, and negotiate his northern boundary directly with Russia without making him a party to the negotiations; and within his domestic affairs they order him with 'dos' and 'dents' as if Afghanistan was a fief of the British Empire. And with all this, they were not prepared to guarantee the external security of Afghanistan, which in all its aspects and respects was so vital for the security and defence of the British Indian Empire.

It was perhaps with this understanding that Shere Ali's Prime Minister was asking Lord Northbrook to consider the borders of Afghanistan as in essence the borders of India, and also to consider the stability of Afghanistan as an essential corollary to the well-being of the British Empire.<sup>45</sup> Shere Ali's Prime Minister was, therefore, asking the Governor General to provide the Amir with enough money and material to fortify his northern and western frontiers, as well as to equip his army with arms and ammunition. In order to subside the internal squabbles, he wanted no British interference in Afghanistan's domestic affairs. The point that the Amir's son Abdullahjan, and nobody else be considered as his rightful heir, however, was not tacitly stressed in the conference, but was asked for in terms of a dynastic guarantee. In brief, the Amir wanted an alliance with the British Government, or else, he wanted precisely to know as

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<sup>44</sup>Prasad, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-135; *Rishtia, op. cit.*, p. 197,

to where he stood with the British Government vis-a-vis the Russians.<sup>46</sup>

The discussion at the Simla Conference started with Northbrook explaining the Anglo-Russian agreement concerning the northern border of Afghanistan. By the agreement, the Russians had conceded Afghanistan to be outside the limits of their expansive action provided the Afghans did not transgress the agreed border limits, and the responsibility of dissuading Afghanistan from such action was that of the British Government. The Viceroy told the Afghan envoy that his government was prepared to safeguard the integrity of Afghanistan if the Amir followed the British advice in regard to his external relations and abstained from disturbing the frontiers of his neighbours, while the British might aid the Amir in repelling an unprovoked aggression.<sup>47</sup>

Two things were obvious. The maintenance of the integrity and independence of Afghanistan was in the interests of the security of India, as the Afghans correctly understood, and therefore they sought sizable material assistance from the British in return. And, although the British were genuine in saying that they wanted only to control the external relations of Afghanistan, but the British practice in regard to Indian states that began, in most cases, with the control of their external relations, had ended up with their eventual absorption into the Indian Empire. Nur Mohammad Shah's apprehensions were not groundless. The British, in the Seistan Award and Anglo-Russian transactions, had clearly demonstrated that they had already usurped the control of Afghanistan's external relations without asking, and now they were simply manoeuvring to get their *de facto* control a *de jure* recognition by getting the assent of the Amir.

Lord Northbrook was inclined to pay the price demanded by the Afghan Prime Minister, and even before the beginning of the Simla Conference,<sup>48</sup> had asked Her Majesty's

<sup>46</sup>Sykes, *Afghanistan*, II, p. 99.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid*; Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

<sup>48</sup>Telegram to Secretary of State, 27 June 1873.



Government to authorize him to make more specific and definite promises of assistance to mollify Amir Shere Ali in accepting the two border transactions, as well as, British control over Afghanistan's foreign relations. In another telegram, Northbrook had written that *Circumstances might occur under which we should consider it incumbent upon us to render him assistance.*<sup>49</sup> The Duke of Argyll, the Secretary of State, in his reply of July 1, 1873, agreed with the general sense of Northbrook's message, but felt the need of 'great caution' in assuring the Amir of British assistance as it was likely to raise undue expectations of the Amir and might entangle the British in unnecessary expenditure *and likely embarrassments with Russia which the British Government wanted to avoid in any case.*<sup>50</sup> This general assurance did not satisfy Nur Mohammad Shah, who wanted to know what specifically the British would do if Russia attacked Afghanistan. The Viceroy again cabled London,<sup>51</sup> asking the Government whether he could promise help to the Amir, in case of unprovoked aggression, if Shere Ali unreservedly accepted to abide by the British advice in all external relations, and that the British would be the sole judge of such necessity. The British Cabinet was only prepared to maintain their 'settled policy' in favour of Afghanistan on the condition that the Amir abided by British advice in regard to his external relations.<sup>52</sup> In brief, the British Government although conscious of its responsibility to see and maintain within their power a strong and independent Afghanistan in the security interest of the Indian Empire, wanted to keep it vague so far as the Amir was concerned. Moreover, they did not share with Shere Ali, his apprehension of Russia's danger, for the latter had agreed to respect the integrity of the Amir's territories.<sup>53</sup>

Northbrook tried his level best to soothe the feelings of

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<sup>49</sup>Dispatch of 30 June 1873.

<sup>50</sup>Italics, author's assessment, not mentioned in any document.

<sup>51</sup>24 July 1873; see also *Rishtia*, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

<sup>52</sup>Argyll to Viceroy, 26 July 1873.

<sup>53</sup>Pasrad, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-141; Sykes, *Afghanistan*, II, pp. 99-100.

the Afghan Prime Minister. The Viceroy told the envoy that short of unqualified obligation to assist the Amir on demand, the British Government were prepared to use their good offices to settle disputes between Afghanistan and any other power. In case British endeavours to bring about an amicable settlement failed, then they would assist the Amir. But the Viceroy declined to give any written assurance whatsoever. In order to strengthen ties Northbrook made available to the Amir five thousand rifles and five lakhs of rupees in cash, with a promise of sending fifteen thousand rifles when received from England.<sup>54</sup>

In retrospect it seems that the difference between the British and the Afghans was largely of approach and *a priori* feeling, than of *a posteriori* assessment and of real substance. The Afghans had not accepted the Seistan Award but with a pinch of salt that their British friends had betrayed them. They accepted it with such far reaching reservations that even today the Seistan question is at issue between them and the Persians.

The Simla Conference was a turning point in Amir Shere Ali's relations with the British Government, it was the parting of the ways. Several things happened which aggravated the relations: Abdullah Jan's nomination as heir-apparent by Shere Ali Khan; change of Government in England with Benjamin Disraeli as the Prime Minister and Lord Salisbury, first, as Secretary of State for India (1874-78) and, then, as Foreign Secretary (1876-1880), while Northbrook resigned as Viceroy in 1876, and Lord Lytton took his place. Finally, with the deterioration in Anglo-Afghan relations, General Kaufmann, the Governor General of Turkistan, increased Russian pressure on Afghanistan.

Shere Ali did not like the air of superiority with which the British treated the Amir and his ministers. The Amir's annoyance was evident by the considerable hesitation with which he accepted the arms offered to him, and his total rejection of the subsidy.<sup>55</sup> While, the Russians got

<sup>54</sup>Prasad, *op. cit.*, 142-43; *Rishtia*, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

<sup>55</sup>Singhal, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

opportunity to gain the favour of the Amir by offering him equality of treatment.

The estrangement was further increased when the Amir intimated the British Government, besides the Government of Persia and Russia, of the nomination of Abdullah Jan as heir and successor, in a communication of November 30, 1873. The reply of the Viceroy was very cool in contrast to the warm felicitations extended to the Amir by the Russian Governor General. Shere Ali's communication to the Viceroy pertaining to Abdullah Jan's nomination was intended to get for it the recognition of the British Government. But the British considered Yakub Khan, who was elder and maturer than Abdullah Jan, to be the rightful successor of Shere Ali.<sup>56</sup> This became manifest when Shere Ali sensing that Yaqub might rebel, asked him to come to Kabul under a promise of 'safe conduct' from the Amir, but imprisoned him on his arrival; Northbrook intervened by urging upon Shere Ali to observe the conditions under which Yakub Khan had come to Kabul, saying that 'by so doing the Ameer will maintain his good name and the friendship of the British Government.' The Viceroy also wanted to receive from the Amir an early assurance on the point and asked Shere Ali for accurate information as to what actually happened.<sup>57</sup>

This was an uncalled for and extremely undiplomatic intervention on the part of the Viceroy in a matter strictly within the domestic affairs of Shere Ali. The already disappointed Amir became chagrined and extremely angry that the friendship of the British Government was contingent upon his following their advice in a strictly personal affair. He became rather certain that the British would not treat him on the basis of equality and that they not only wanted to control his foreign policy but domestic affairs also by reducing him to a status of a fief of the British Empire.

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<sup>56</sup>Polt. B., No. 39, February 1874.

<sup>57</sup>Telegram to Peshawar, 17 November 1874, quoted in Prasad. *op. cit.*, pp. 147-148.

Manifestation of Shere Ali's displeasure with Great Britain came to the fore, when he declined to permit the British agents, Colonel Baker and Douglas Forsyth, to pass through Afghanistan. The reasons underlying the Amir's refusal were far-reaching. The Afghans were not only suspicious of the presence of European officers in their country, but altogether hated their presence in the Afghan landscape, and Shere Ali feared the occurrence of some untoward incident which might further aggravate the none-too-pleasant relations with the British Government. While refusing permission, Shere Ali Khan reminded Lord Northbrook of the pledges given by his two immediate predecessors, Lawrence and Mayo, that no British agents or officers would be placed against the wishes of the Government and the people of Afghanistan. To Shere Ali, even a request for the passage of British agents through Afghanistan was contrary to the pledge given by the British Government.<sup>58</sup>

(v). **Forward Policy.** Lord Northbrook, the Viceroy of India, was a liberal, and when in early 1874, Gladstone's Liberal Government was replaced by that of the Conservatives under Disraeli, with Lord Salisbury as Secretary of State for India, the conflict between Northbrook and the Conservative Government became inevitable, as it was soon evident that the new Government was to follow a more 'spirited' foreign policy, which in the context of Afghanistan and Central Asia came to be known as 'forward' policy.

It was, however, in January 1875, when European politics was bringing estrangement between Great Britain and Russia due to the Turkish question, that the British Government became concerned with Russian activities in Central Asia. Although British relations with the Amir of Afghanistan were frosty, Lord Salisbury instructed Northbrook, in the dispatch of January 22, 1875,<sup>59</sup> to prevail upon Shere Ali Khan to accept the British agents in Kandahar and Herat, for watching the developments on the northern and western borders of Afghanistan. Salisbury

<sup>58</sup>Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 151-152.

complained of lack of information concerning Russian movements, as the native Muslim agent posted at Kabul was not giving authentic information.<sup>60</sup> The Secretary of State also doubted whether the Russians were acting in accordance with their earlier promises in view of the later deterioration of the Anglo-Russian relations in Europe,<sup>61</sup> and hence the necessity of stationing permanent British agents in Afghanistan.

Lord Northbrook, after consulting his Council and other experienced officers on the subject, replied that in the opinion of the Indian Government, the time and circumstances were unsuitable for taking the initiative with Shere Ali Khan pertaining to the stationing of the British agents within his dominions. It was pointed out that the sirdars and other people of Afghanistan would strongly object to the suggestion; and further that in view of the Amir's somewhat insecure position, and the prevalent anti-British feeling in Afghanistan, the Amir could not disregard, but to his own peril, the opinion of his people.<sup>62</sup> The Government of India counselled patience and conciliation. But Salisbury was completely oblivious of the difficulties facing Amir, he merely repeated his instructions. Northbrook and his council again protested. The Viceroy in his reply pointed out that on such a demand the Amir would certainly want an unconditional commitment from the British government to defend Afghanistan against external attack. The Amir would have also been surprised by such a demand, as his earlier requests for a defensive alliance had been set aside by the British government. Now when the British fear of the Russian threat was acute, the Amir would certainly ask much in return. Moreover, Northbrook pointed out that even if a British agent was accepted, he would be surrounded by Afghan spies under the pretext of guarding him, and in such circumstances, he would not be able to do much for which he would be there.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Salisbury to Disraeli, 2 January 1875; see also P. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 427 for Sir Bartle Frere's opinion on the question of agents.

<sup>61</sup>Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>62</sup>Adye, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>63</sup>P. Roberts, *op. cit.*; p. 427; and Sykes, *Afghanistan*, II, pp. 101-102.



But Lord Salisbury was disposed to neglect and even underrated the advice of the Governor General and the Indian officials. Perhaps, the Secretary of State did not simply want to listen anything against what he had decided. It also became clear that Northbrook could not work much longer under the circumstances. After repeating his protest of dissent, he resigned with the following warning to Salisbury.<sup>64</sup>

By taking the initiative, I feel certain that you are throwing away your best card, and running the risk of embarrassment for the future, both political and financial.. *and perhaps* to subject us to the risk of another unnecessary and costly war in Afghanistan before many years are over.

Northbrook was an able administrator who possessed what can be termed 'cautious commonsense' with a reliance upon ascertained fact and experience and a power of steady and effective action.<sup>65</sup> With his resignation, the choice fell on Lord Lytton, who was prepared to go the whole hog with Salisbury in his spirited and forward policy, perhaps one step further, to precipitate the disaster which Northbrook forecast.

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<sup>64</sup>see both Sykes, *Afghanistan*, II, p. 12; and P. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 429.

<sup>65</sup>P. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 428.

# 8

## Lord Lytton And The Afghan Question 1876-1880

Afghanistan must be admitted to be a great physical difficulty. It is difficult to conquer, difficult to hold, difficult to sustain an army in, and most difficult of all to leave.

SIR HERBERT EDWARDS

**T**O what extent suspicion of the Russian designs, which was diligently fostered by a powerful party in England throughout the seventies, accentuated the very danger against which it was directed: this is a question which is most likely to remain unanswered. To some, Russia had just the same right to approach Afghanistan from the one side as Great Britain had from the other; if the interests of the Indian Empire called for a policy of annexations and protectorates, so did those of the possessions of Russia in Central Asia; and the reasons which operated in the one case applied equally in the other. However, the Russian diplomacy was not as straightforward as it might have been. The Tsar's advisers were in the habit of carrying on two policies, the one at St. Petersburg, official and con-

ciliatory, and the other in Central Asia, unofficial and at times aggressive, yet open to repudiation at discretion.

The Granville-Gorchakov Agreement of 1873 could not settle the Afghan question, nor did it mark an end of the voluminous correspondence between England and Russia. The Disraeli Government, which returned to power in early 1874, sought to reverse the policy of the Gladstone Government: the Liberals had sought by diplomacy to limit the Russian advance; the Conservatives resolved to advance and preclude the forward approach of Russia towards India. In other words a strictly unaggressive attitude based on non-interference in Afghan affairs coupled with marked consideration for Afghan susceptibilities were being replaced by a spirited foreign policy with imperialist aims, the realisation of which was instrumented through a subtle and provocative diplomacy.

Government's instructions to Lord Lytton were personally handed over to him when he left England in order to prevent their falling into the hands of Northbrook who had still to hand over charge as Viceroy.<sup>2</sup> The instructions,<sup>3</sup> although they left considerable discretion with regard to the means by which the policy was to be carried out by Lytton, were quite explicit as to its object. The Viceroy was empowered to be in readiness to give definite assurances, which Shere Ali had asked for in 1873, and was expected to demand more emphatically in 1876: (1) a fixed and augmented subsidy; (2) a more decided recognition than had been accorded by the British to the order of succession established by him in favour of the younger son, Abdullah Jan; (3) and a definite pledge, 'by treaty or otherwise,' of British support in case of foreign aggression. Ironically for Shere Ali, the acceptance of these terms by the British was made contingent upon the Amir allowing a 'permanent' British Resident at Herat. To invite the confidence of the Amir, Lytton was to despatch a friendly mission to ascertain the exact attitude of the Amir towards British India, and if the Amir were to

<sup>1</sup>*Camb. Hist. of British Foreign Policy*, III, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup>Singhal, *op. cit.*, p.15.

<sup>3</sup>Despatch of 28 February 1876.

refuse the mission, 'the whole Afghan policy was to be reconsidered'. The terms and stipulations were reasonable enough to the extent of being a preliminary condition to defensive alliance and exploring the state of mind of the Amir. But if the Amir chose to do without such an alliance, the British and Lord Lytton could not be justified for enforcing a mission on the Afghans, much less, to make his refusal a *casus belli*.

Lord Lytton's participation in the Afghan question began before he sailed for India. A few days before he left London he paid a visit to Count Schouvaloff, the Russian Ambassador, who had expressed a desire to confer with him. Schouvaloff informed Lytton that he had made to the British Government the proposal that some permanent means of direct and confidential communication should be established between the Russian military forces in Central Asia and the Viceroy of India. He said that the St. Petersburg Cabinet was seriously alarmed by the critical condition of its relations with England in regard to Central Asian affairs, and that the Tsar was desirous of remaining on good terms with the British, and of restraining the 'greed of territory' evinced by his own military officers. It was in the hope of avoiding future misunderstanding that the Russian Government made the present suggestion. To open correspondence with the new Governor General, General Van Kaufmann despatched a letter<sup>1</sup> through Count Schouvaloff to the following effect:

Russia and England had in Asia one common interest and one common foe. The common interest was civilisation...; and their common foe was Islamism, the only danger to the British rule in India.....Mohamedan subjects of India would make use of the first favourable opportunity to rouse up a general rising against England in India; it is a matter, therefore, of the very highest importance that England should be closely allied and united with Russia, and that *Afghanistan*, as well as, *other Central Asiatic Mahomedan States*, ought to be divided between Russia and England so that the frontiers of the Indian Empire and that of Russia should be closely in touch with each other.

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in the Autobiography of Abdurrahman, II, p. 262; Terentyff, *op. cit.*, II, p. 311.

This would save England from every anxiety, because she would have her true friend the Christian Empire, Russia, near at hand to help her at times of risings in India, or in any other difficulties with which she might be embarrassed. England ought, therefore, to throw herself entirely on the friendly assurances and promises of Russian support.

The British fear of Russian aggression on India was considered by Kaufmann to be a bugbear—a result of misconception of the whole situation which direct communication between Tashkent and Calcutta was to rectify. Spurred by such fanciful ideas, the Russian Governor General had kept in readiness a complimentary letter to the new Viceroy which was to be despatched through Afghanistan in the care of Shere Ali to be forwarded to Peshawar so that Lytton would find it on his arrival in Calcutta. Kaufmann withheld the despatch of the letter until he could ascertain as to how it would be received by the British Viceroy.

Lord Lytton's reply to this communication was that since the Russian Ambassador desired a frank statement of his views, he would say that the British Government would tolerate no attempt on the part of General Kaufmann to obtain influence in Afghanistan or in any of the frontier states, and that the British would absolutely refuse to co-operate with Russia in any 'anti-Mohammedan' crusade. Lord Lytton said that in the estimation of his government Afghanistan and Baluchistan were considered the bastions of the defence of British India, and therefore they would defend them with all their power against aggression by any foreign state. Furthermore, they would never knowingly allow Russia to enter into any relations with those states which might have the effect of undermining their influence over these rulers or their people, and would never become a party to any injury to their Muslim allies or subjects.<sup>5</sup>

While rejecting the Russian proposals thus emphatically this interview with Count Schouvaloff, left on the mind of Lord Lytton the conviction that Russia was desirous of coming to an understanding with England that would have led to the absorption of the states intervening between the

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<sup>5</sup>Abdurrahman, *op. cit.*, p. 262 *et seq.*



Russian and British possessions, the partition of Afghanistan, and the establishment of a common frontier between the two empires.<sup>6</sup> He did not intend that these things should ever happen.

Lord Lytton found the relations between the Indian Government and Amir Shere Ali Khan highly unsatisfactory on his arrival in India in April 1876. A number of factors had contributed to widen the breach between them and to make easier the wedge which the Russians were thought to be driving in the territory avowed by them to be outside their sphere of influence.

In fact, the Russian diplomacy during this entire period was geared to the task of making the British Government believe in the peaceful and friendly intentions of Russia and rekindling in them a hatred against the Afghans. And, at the same time, General Kaufmann was communicating with Shere Ali Khan, persuading and mollifying the Amir to turn against the British and enter into an alliance with the Imperial Government. Thus, the Russians by a policy of double-dealing and duplicity were about to succeed, for a while at least, in sowing the seeds of discord between the British and the Afghans.

One point of discord between the British and the Afghans was the arbitration by the Indian Government of a boundary dispute between the Amir and the Shah of Persia concerning Seistan, with a settlement that was unacceptable to the Amir. Another was the refusal of the Indian Government to promise its support to Abdullah Jan, installed by the Amir as heir-apparent in preference to an older son, Yakub, who was in revolt against his father. In both instances the Indian Government was placed in an awkward position; for however equitable the settlement of the Seistan boundary question might have been, it was sure to be unsatisfactory; indeed equity was the very thing that would make it so.<sup>7</sup> As for Abdullah Jan, his qualities were at best uncertain; and a

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<sup>6</sup>Lytton to Cranbrook, 17 August 1878.

<sup>7</sup>Sykes, *Sir Mortimer Durand*, p. 83; Shah of Persia was equally dissatisfied with the settlement.

real danger was involved in an agreement to support, to the exclusion of others, any candidate for the Afghan throne. A third and perhaps most important factor was the refusal of the British to guarantee the territories of the Amir against external aggression. In this shape of things, the British Indian Government was required to adopt a sound policy in order to take a positive action in her relations with the dissatisfied Amir of Afghanistan.

The British policy of drift and lack of calculated direction left the Amir disgruntled. The Russians were the logical recipients of the negative sort of friendship that resulted from his feelings. They were naturally not averse to exploiting the advantage which they had gained. Thus developed between the Russians and the Amir *a correspondence*, the cordiality of which grew with the increased estrangement of his relations with the British and theirs with the Russians.<sup>78</sup> The existence of such a friendly correspondence between Russian officials Shere and Ali had been intimated by Count Schouvaloff in his conversations with Lord Lytton before the latter's departure for India.

Lord Lytton drew the attention of the Home Government to the fact that whereas the Amir had at first sought the advice of the British concerning the replies that should be sent to General Kaufmann, he had ceased to do so now, and was reported to be holding conference with persons through whom the letters were despatched. He submitted<sup>9</sup> that the time had come when it was expedient that the attention of the Russian Government be seriously invited to this correspondence, and that,

steps should be taken by Her Majesty's Government to prevent a continuance of proceedings which we cannot but regard as altogether inconsistent with the assurance given by Prince Gorchakov to Lord Clarendon in 1869, and since then, frequently renewed by the Cabinet at St. Petersburg, that Afghanistan is regarded as entirely beyond the sphere of Russian influence.

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<sup>78</sup>Terentyff, *op. cit.*, II, p. 170; Lord Roberts, *41 years in India*, II, p. 247.

<sup>9</sup>Lytton to Salisbury, 18 September 1876,

In the end Lytton posed the question as to whether the Russo-Afghan correspondence would lead to the replacement of British influence by that of Russia at the Court of Kabul.

In addition to the reports of friendly correspondence between the Amir and the Russian officials in Turkestan came rumours that the bearers of the letters were remaining in Kabul and were acting in the capacity of agents of treaty relations with the Amir. On October 2, 1876 the British Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Derby addressed through Lord Loftus, British Ambassador at St. Petersburg, the Russian Government concerning these allegations as follows:<sup>10</sup>

I enclose to your Excellency a copy of the Cabul Diaries received from the Indian Government. You will find on page 10 of those diaries a letter addressed by General Kaufmann to the Ameer of Cabul which appears to have been conveyed to its destination by an Asiatic agent, who still remains at Cabul, and it is reported from other sources that his intentions are to induce Shere Ali to sign an offensive and defensive alliance with the Russian Government as well as a Commercial Treaty.

Although the tone and insinuation of General Kaufmann's letter appeared to British Government to be undesirable, the letter itself did not contain any statement of a distinctly objectionable character. Lord Loftus was asked to address a note to the Russian Government, reminding them that Afghanistan lay completely outside the sphere within which Russia might be called upon to exercise her influence, and endeavour, if possible, to obtain from the Russian Government a 'written disclaimer' of any intention on their part to negotiate treaties with Shere Ali without the consent of the British Government.<sup>11</sup>

Lord Loftus failed to obtain the written disclaimer that was desired. On the other hand M. de Giers, in a conversation with the British Ambassador, held that he had no knowledge of any Russian agent having been sent to the Court of the Amir,<sup>12</sup> and subsequently Prince Gorchakov

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<sup>10</sup>For. Pol. Dept., S.S. No. 11/84, 11 September 1877.

<sup>11</sup>Derby to Loftus, 2 October 1876.

<sup>12</sup>Loftus to Derby, 19 October 1876.

reiterated that *there was no Russian Agent at Cabul so far he knew*.<sup>13</sup> As for General Kaufmann's letters, they were purely complimentary and had no political significance. At the same time Gorchakov denied current rumours to the effect that the Russians were contemplating an expedition against Merv.<sup>14</sup> These informal denials of the presence of a Russian agent at Kabul and Russian efforts to negotiate treaties with the Amir received formal confirmation in a letter of M. de Giers to Lord Loftus dated December 1, 1876.<sup>15</sup> Not only were the British charges unequivocally denied and repudiated, but counter charges were brought against the British. It was said that certain reports had reached Tashkent regarding the movements of the Indian army towards the Afghan borders and the Pamirs, where the boundaries of Badakshan and Wakhan met with those of Karategin, an area under the influence of the Amir of Bokhara. It was also alleged that warlike preparations were afoot at Herat with the intention of launching an expedition against the Turkomans of Merv. This was considered to constitute a direct infraction of the Anglo-Russian understandings of 1872-1873, by which Great Britain had engaged to dissuade the Amir from committing any act of aggression beyond his territories; and the British Government were asked to employ their influence over the Amir of Afghanistan to prevent the encroachments of this nature.

Exchanges, similar to the above, between London and St. Petersburg continued. News from India, on the one hand, was constantly reporting the continuous flow of correspondence between General Kaufmann and Amir Shere Ali 'far exceeding the requirements of courtesy', and its bearers who were constantly at Kabul being 'regarded and treated by the Amir as agents of the Russian Government'. On the other hand, there were protestations of the innocuous character of these letters which the Russian Government said, by way of explanation, were sent only once or twice a year as customary compliments from one neighbour to another.

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<sup>13</sup>Loftus to Derby, 15 November 1876.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>Giers to Loftus, 1 December 1876,

The Imperial Government denied, whatsoever, all knowledge of the presence of any Russian agent at Kabul.<sup>16</sup>

As has already been seen, Lord Lytton was given specific instructions to win over Shere Ali Khan in the interests of the security of India. He was to undo the soft and inactive policy of the Liberals which to his Conservative Government had produced unsatisfactory results in the form of alienation of Shere Ali Khan.<sup>17</sup> On paper the Conservative policy looked reasonable, but its application by Lytton, particularly his language and style was not to the liking of the Amir of Afghanistan, who wanted to be treated with respect and dignity as an independent sovereign, rather than as a subordinate of the British Empire.

The Viceroy, first of all, asked Shere Ali to receive a complimentary British mission in Afghanistan which was to announce formally the assumption by Queen Victoria of the title of the 'Empress of India'. This the Amir declined politely as unnecessary; and among the reasons for the refusal was that the Amir could not guarantee the safety of the mission due to the extreme bigotry and fanaticism of his subjects.<sup>18</sup> Besides, if the Amir admitted a British mission, then, he thought, he would not be able to refuse a similar request for a Russian mission. To this Lytton reacted as an imperial master; he did not like the Amir equating British and the Russian vis-a-vis their respective position in regard to Afghanistan. The Russians had assured the British Government, time and again, that Afghanistan lay beyond the pale of their influence. The Amir, on the other hand, became fully conscious of the fact that he was being treated by the British as their subordinate. The Amir's refusal was, however, supported by three members of the Viceroy's Council—Sir William Muir, Sir Henry Norman and Sir Arthur Hobhouse—on the ground that Shere Ali was acting within his rights in doing so; and, further that, it was unfair on the part of the British Government to impress upon the

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<sup>16</sup>Lytton to Salisbury, 3 May 1877.

<sup>17</sup>*Vide* Philips, *op. cit.*, pp. 449-51.

<sup>18</sup>*Vide* text in Philips, *op. cit.*, pp. 451-52.



Amir the nature of the mission as temporary, when everybody knew the intention of the British Government in favour of establishing a permanent embassy<sup>19</sup> at some strategic point in Afghanistan to watch the Russian activities.

Here it would be pertinent to pause and to take note of Lord Lytton's views on Afghanistan,<sup>20</sup> of the Amir, and what precisely should be done to salvage British position at the Court of Kabul and thereby ensure the security of India against Russian machinations. He did not want and could not permit the situation to further drift against the British at Kabul. He considered Afghanistan a state far too weak and barbarous to be left isolated and uninfluenced between the two great military empires. He directed his energies to create a strong bulwark against Russia 'by aiding Afghanistan to become a powerful and prosperous state'; but this action of the British Government was to be contingent upon Afghanistan remaining friendly with the British. The British were prepared, Lytton wrote, to defend Afghanistan against all aggression but could not allow Shere Ali 'to fall under the influence of any power whose interests are antagonistic to our own, and thereby become the tool of ambition to which the whole energy of the British Government will in case of need be resolutely opposed.' He cautioned the Amir that the British did not want to annex Afghanistan, while the Russians wanted the dismemberment of Afghanistan and its eventual absorption into the Russian dominions or its division between Russia and Britain, as has already been mentioned a little earlier in these pages.<sup>21</sup> The Viceroy exhorted the Amir to choose between his two powerful neighbours, but his words, instead of extending a hand of friendship to the Amir, were couched in such a language which cannot but be construed as of an order from a superior to his subordinate:<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>P. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 433.

<sup>20</sup>Lytton's views are summarised in his letter to Girdlestone, 27 August 1876, see text in Philips, *op. cit.*, pp. 449-51.

<sup>21</sup>Kaufmann to Schouvaloff, *vide* Abdurrahman, *op. cit.*, II, p. 262; see also footnote 2.

<sup>22</sup>Lytton to Girdlestone, 27 August 1876.

...if he does not promptly prove himself our loyal friend, I shall be obliged to regard him as our enemy, and treat him accordingly. A tool in the hands of Russia I will never allow him to become. Such a tool it would be my duty to break before it could be used.

Holding these views, it was but natural for Lytton to be irritated by Shere Ali's refusal to his proposal, however polite that might have been. The Viceroy wrote a second letter,<sup>23</sup> but it was more strongly worded, and in which he maintained that the Amir's reply was couched in 'contemptuous disregard' of British interests, and warned Shere Ali that he was isolating Afghanistan 'from the alliance and support of the British Government.' This time, however, Shere Ali's reply<sup>24</sup> was more conciliatory, as it was based on long and protracted deliberation with his sirdars and advisers. The Amir's suggestion was that either the envoy of the British Government and his representative meet at the frontier to thrash out the controversial problems between the two states, or the Indian Agent at Kabul might be summoned by the Viceroy to convey the whole attitude of the British Government to be conveyed back to the Amir in private. Only then, Shere Ali concluded, he might be in a position to decide which course to adopt in the interest of his country.

The alternative suggestion of the Amir was accepted and the British Muslim Agent at Kabul, Nawab Ata Mohammad Khan met the Viceroy at Simla in October 1876. At that time, Lord Lytton was so much annoyed with the Amir, that a peaceful settlement was out of the question. It was conveyed through the Agent that either Shere Ali choose the British friendship which would bring him honour and security, or else, be their foe and in which case he was threatened with dire consequences.

Also, on the Amir's part, there was a catalogue of grievances against the British Government. He was annoyed because of the 'unjust' Seistan Award of 1873, and immediately by the development of British relationship

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<sup>23</sup>Of 8 July 1876.

<sup>24</sup>Of 3 September 1876,

with the Khan of Kalat who had long been under the suzerainty of Afghanistan. The Amir was displeased with the British because of the latter's support to his rebellious son Yakub Khan and many other matters in which the British were, according to Shere Ali, guided solely by their own 'self-interest' and ignored the interests of Afghanistan. The specific matters which the Amir desired, could be enumerated as follows: first, that the British should stop insisting on a European agent in Afghanistan, particularly, at Kabul; secondly, that the British Government recognise Shere Ali's declared heir, Abdullah Jan, and disclaim all connection with Yakub Khan or any other pretender; thirdly, that Shere Ali should be supported on demand with troops and money by the British against external aggression, as well as, to protect the Amir from internal disturbances, and a permanent subsidy should be fixed for him; and finally, the British should not interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, and treat the Amir with dignity and respect in their address, and should engage that they regard the Amir's friends and enemies as their own, and the Amir would in return reciprocate the British engagement.<sup>25</sup>

It was the dead wall of suspicion which was alienating the Afghans and the British from each other. Lytton was prepared to give more or less the same which Shere Ali was asking for: a definite treaty of alliance, pledging the British Government to defend Afghanistan from Russian aggression; recognition of the order of succession established by Shere Ali Khan in nominating Abdullah Jan as heir; British assistance in the fortification of Herat; and, with the permission of the Amir, aid of British officers for training Afghan troops in the most 'improved methods' of warfare,<sup>26</sup> so as to prepare them for effectively meeting the eventuality of Russian aggression. But all this was made subservient to the prior acceptance by Shere Ali of a British mission within his territories.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the

<sup>25</sup>Summary of a conversation with Nawab Ata Mohammad Khan at Simla, 7 October 1876, *Afghan Correspondence*, p.181; see also Prasad, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-174.

<sup>26</sup>Lytton to Girdlestone, 27 August 1876, referred to above.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

Amir had to 'make up his mind quickly', within a short time, as Lytton was not prepared to leave the relations with Afghanistan 'any longer in their present ambiguous and undignified condition'.<sup>28</sup> Thus with the departure of Ata Mohammad Khan from Simla, at the end of the year 1876, the breach between Shere Ali Khan and Lord Lytton had been widened to an extent virtually impossible to bridge, despite some further efforts.

Amir Shere Ali after listening to the proposals of the British Government from Nawab Ata Mohammad Khan, was compelled by the circumstances to give them careful consideration. After duly consulting important Afghan chiefs, the Amir ostensibly seemed inclined to accept British agents within his territory in the name of 'yielding to necessity',<sup>29</sup> but still felt that the residence of British officers would not be to the advantage of the two Governments. And when the Amir deputed his two officers, Syed Nur Muhammad Shah and Mir Akhor Ahmad Khan to negotiate with the British officer, Sir Lewis Pelly, at Peshawar, he imposed certain conditions,<sup>30</sup> which he termed as safeguards, on the stationing of British officers within Afghanistan. First, he desired that, in case of injury to the life and property of these agents, the matter was to be decided according to the law and custom of Afghanistan; and the British Government should engage not to pressurize the Amir in such eventuality. Secondly, the Amir desired that these agents should not interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, whether civil or military, and for that reason, therefore, the duties of all British officers be precisely defined. The third condition was that if Russia desired to send her agents into Afghanistan, the onus of preventing them from doing so would be that of the British Government and not of Afghanistan. And, finally, if the British aid to Afghanistan was not considered adequate by the Amir, he should be allowed to decline it, as the residence of British agents would not be affected by the absence of aid.

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<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Prasad, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-91.

**(i) Peshawar Conference (January-March 1877),**

The British plenipotentiary, Sir Lewis Pelly had also the instructions in regard to the objects<sup>31</sup> of negotiations with the Afghan representatives. The British Government was prepared to guarantee the external security of Afghanistan, but in respect of the internal security, Lord Lytton was prepared to ensure it to the extent it was conducive to British interests. And finally, the Viceroy believed that the twin objects could be achieved by the stationing of British agents within the borders of Afghanistan.

The main difference of opinion between the British and the Afghan representatives was on the stationing of British agents. The negotiations dragged on for a long time. They agreed on practically every thing else, but the Afghan Prime Minister steadily refused to concede the point that a British officer should reside in Afghanistan. The main disadvantage with the British was that they had made the question of agent not only an essential pre-requisite for the negotiation of treaty with the Amir but also a prior condition for further negotiations. Nur Mohammad Shah invoked Article 7 of the 1857 treaty with Amir Dost Mohammad Khan which provided that the British Government might maintain an agent at Kabul, but that agent was not to be an Englishman.<sup>32</sup> And Shere Ali did not want to consent to the abrogation of this article. But Lytton held that the said treaty was concluded for a limited purpose to serve a particular exigency, which was no longer obtaining in 1877, and therefore the treaty had outlived its utility and its stipulations were no more valid. The Afghan representatives raised other difficulties in accepting the British suggestion regarding the agents; but the British envoy remained true to his brief—he knew only one thing, to stress the need of British Agents in Afghanistan; if the Afghan delegates refused to accept the British demand, then negotiations would not simply proceed.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup>Thornton to Pelly, 17 October 1876, cited in Prasad, pp. 192-193.

<sup>32</sup>*Vide* text in Appendix XVI (b).

<sup>33</sup>*Afghan Correspondence*, pp. 203-209; also Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 197.



As a matter of fact, Lord Lytton had instructed the British representative in such a way that he was determined to drive the Prime Minister of the Amir instead of seriously leading him to arrive at some negotiated settlement. Perhaps, Lytton had started dealing with Shere Ali Khan with a view to persuade the Afghan Amir to accept British interests as those of Afghanistan. But once it was decided that the stationing of British agents in Afghanistan was the only means to protect British interests, the means were so much emphasized that the British evidently forgot whether their emphasis did in reality remain in consonance with their objective or not. And with their undue emphasis on the reception of the mission, further estranging their relations with the Amir—they feared a loss of influence in Afghanistan.

On the other hand, the Afghan delegation had accumulated three additional grievances against the British Government: Viceroy's interference on behalf of Yakub Khan; British gifts to Mir of Wakhan, a tributary of Afghanistan; and Sir Robert Sandeman's treaty with the Khan of Kalat, and the establishment of a British post at Quetta, without any reference to the Amir, who took it as a measure of aggressive intention of the British Government on his territorial integrity. The Khan of Kalat was also considered to be under the Afghan suzerainty, though nominal. Strategically, Quetta was located on the Khojak-Bolan passes leading directly to Kandahar.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, the Amir in his extreme suspicion of the British intentions, took the suggestion of stationing of British agents within his territories as a prelude to further extension of British influence over Afghanistan on the pattern of what had happened to the Indian states. The Amir desired the friendship of the British on the basis of equality. As regards the proposed treaty or agreement, the Amir wanted it to be precise, definite and equally binding on both the parties,<sup>35</sup> while the Viceroy wanted to keep it sublimely vague, which naturally created suspicion in the thinking of

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<sup>34</sup>Philips, *op. cit.*, pp. 451-5; and for details, P. Roberts, *op. cit.*, 434; and Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 172 *et seq.*

<sup>35</sup>Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

the Afghan delegates and the Amir. Shere Ali Khan also feared that if his people came to know that he was even slightly under the control of a foreign power, he would not be able to retain his throne. Lytton wanted every thing on his own terms: he was conscious of the power of the British Empire as much as Shere Ali desired to remain free from foreign domination, a master of his own.

Thus, the Peshawar Conference, which was doomed to failure from the very beginning, dragged on falteringly, and was finally terminated by Sir Lewis Pelly under instructions from Lord Lytton in the first week of March, after about two months of abortive negotiations. A few days later the British envoy declared his withdrawal from the negotiations. On March 26, Nur Mohammad Shah, the Afghan Prime Minister and chief negotiator died. Although Lytton knew that a new Afghan envoy was on his way to Peshawar with the authority of the Amir *'to accept eventually all the conditions of the British Government'*<sup>36</sup> Lytton in his spirited style publicly announced the rupture of the negotiations.

The secret dispatch was opposed by three members of Viceroy's Council, namely, Sir Henry Norman, Sir Arthur Hobhouse and Sir William Muir, who desired to record their note of dissent but were persuaded by Lytton to do so later.<sup>37</sup> These members complained of this in the British newspapers. Despite parliamentary and public criticism of Lytton's spirited style in dealing with Shere Ali, the Conservative Government of Disraeli accepted the forward policy of the Viceroy.

The extent to which the British and the Russian policies towards Afghanistan were a reaction to their antagonistic relationship which developed from 1875, when a rebellion in Bosnia and Herzegovina led eventually to Russo-Turkish war in which Disraeli's Government took a strongly anti-Russian line, is rather difficult to gauge. But it seems, as it appeared then, that the Central Asian question,

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<sup>36</sup>Lytton to Salisbury, 10 May 1877. Secret.

<sup>37</sup>Singhal, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

in certain respects, was a reaction to the Eastern question as far as the Anglo-Russian relations were concerned.

The Balkan crisis had finally resulted in the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878, at the end of which Russia had imposed a crippling Treaty of San Stefano on Turkey. These dramatic events held out ominous portents for the British imperial life-line in the form of Russian control over the Turkish Straits and the Balkans in the shape of an outlet into the Mediterranean. Disraeli countered these moves by despatching British naval forces to Constantinople, landing Indian troops on Malta, and by occupying Cyprus. The Congress of Berlin (1878), in which the British were supported by Germany and Austria in checking Russia's expansive designs in Europe by cutting down her military gains, caused profound resentment at St. Petersburg. In the wake of these developments in Europe, however, Russian activities in Central Asia and Afghanistan did increase. An extract from the *Moscow Gazette* of July 19, 1878 may be cited as reflecting the Russian attitude of the period.<sup>38</sup>

The time has arrived for Russia to establish her influence over the whole of Central Asia, and this is all the more easy as the ruler of Afghanistan is not on good terms with England—our foe in Central Asia. The concentration of our influence on the frontiers of the territory of the Empress of India would be natural answer to the English seizure of Cyprus... Such may be unobtrusive, even peaceable, object of the military operation undertaken by the troops of Turkestan military circuit... In Asia there are two political Powers confronting each other, and they must inevitably come into collision. England wishes to be Russia's nearest neighbour in Asia Minor, and it is only natural, therefore, that Russia, in her turn, should desire to approach somewhat nearer to the English frontiers in India.

## (ii) Rupture with Shere Ali

However, it was the fault of Lytton to have provided a chance to the Russians to try to gain a foothold in Afghanistan. After the rupture of the Peshawar Conference, the Muslim Indian agent was also withdrawn from Kabul; and for a very crucial one year period, there was no contact between the British and the Afghan governments, during

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<sup>38</sup>Parl. Papers, 1878, LXXX, p. 141.

which the Russians were allowed to bask under the full sunshine of Afghan favours.

Inter-connection between the Eastern and the Central Asian questions emerged in the form of a Turkish mission to Kabul in September-October 1877. The object of the mission was to use the religious title of the Sultan of Turkey as the Caliph of all Muslims to wean Amir Shere Ali Khan away from an anti-British stand, and attempt to secure an Anglo-Afghan understanding by counteracting the influence of Russia. The mission was manipulated by Sir H. Layard the then British Ambassador at Constantinople and a friend of Lord Lytton.\* The Turkish Government perhaps wanted to pay back for the British support in Europe.

Several British Indian officers, including Sir Louis Cavagnari, were opposed to this mission and fore-warned the Government of the futility of religious appeal to the Afghans; it was the understanding of these officers that religion was invoked by these people only as and when it suited their interests and not as a matter of faith. Furthermore, it was also emphasized that the mission would be suspected to have been inspired by the British Government. Lytton, however, thought it worth trying, as it might help in changing the opinion of the Afghan people in favour of the British; he believed that if the mission totally failed, that would not do much harm to the British interests.

The mission which landed in Bombay in early August 1877, was honourably escorted to the Afghan frontier, reaching Afghanistan on September 27, 1877.

Shere Ali warmly welcomed the mission at Kabul; and the Turkish envoy K.M K. Effendi tried his level best to turn the Amir against Russia, but in vain. The Amir was fully aware of the nature of the mission. He opened the interview with a barrage of charges against the British encroachments,<sup>39</sup> and said that the Russians had given him and his country no cause of complaint, but to the contrary, General Kauffmann had approached him on the basis of

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\*For details of the mission see Singhal, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-30.

<sup>39</sup>See texts in Philips, *op. cit.*, pp. 451-52.

equality, while the British treated him as if they were his superiors.

The Amir considered the British not only selfish and undependable but unwise, having committed several blunders : they had incited and supported the rebellion of his 'undutiful son', Yakub Khan; they had annexed Quetta and sought influence at Gilgit, without reference to the Amir and ignoring his rights of suzerainty over these two territories; and, finally, 'for a place like Quetta they have severed friendship with an old and trusted friend... and now they are causing anxiety to a friend of theirs, and of such long standing as myself<sup>40</sup>...', by erecting fortifications on the Afghan border and by war-like postures against the Amir.

As for the rapprochement with the British, Shere Ali reiterated his friendship with them and assured that he would never allow the Russians a 'passage to Hindostan,'<sup>41</sup> while he wanted the British to desist from pressing for their agents inside his territory, which he could not accept due to the bigotry of his subjects,<sup>42</sup> and considered himself incapable of preventing any harm being done to the Europeans who were considered as infidels by his people.

With the failure of the Turkish mission, a clash between Lytton and Shere Ali--the two irreconcilable personalities, seemed inevitable. Lytton was bent upon undoing the so-called 'inactivity' policy of the liberals, and was certain of his abilities to manage Amir Shere Ali, if need be, by force and shape the destiny of Afghanistan. For this, he wanted British agents stationed in Afghanistan and refused to consider the desirability of accepting Muslim agents to mollify the aggravated feelings of Shere Ali Khan. In brief, Lytton wanted his will to be followed for ensuring the safety of the Indian Empire. He could not rely on Russian promises, and had the unequivocal support of Lord Salisbury, the Secretary of State for India in the British Cabinet.

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<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*



While Shere Ali, in his recalcitrant mood, must have hoped for Russian help in case of British action, otherwise, it is difficult to comprehend the Amir's attitude. Anyway, the failure of the mission, accelerated General Kauffmann's interest in Afghanistan.

Increasingly intimate relations between Kauffmann and Shere Ali culminated, in June 1878, into a significant letter from the Russian Governor General of Turkestan to the Amir of Afghanistan. The letter informed the Amir that the relations between Russia and Britain were of great consequence and importance to Afghanistan and its dependencies. Therefore, Kauffmann continued, he had deputed General Stolietoff, 'an officer high in the favour of the Emperor', to inform Shere Ali of the secret message of the Governor General. The Amir was asked to pay careful heed to the message and give a considered reply. The letter concluded with the following words :

Your union and friendship with the Russian Government will be beneficial to the latter and still more so to you. The advantages of a close alliance with the Russian Government will be permanently evident.

This letter was received by the Amir at Kabul through General Stolietoff on August 9, 1878. The Government of India was very much disturbed at this turn of tables against it by the development of the Russo-Afghan proceedings, and more so by the terms of the proposed treaty which General Stolietoff was credited to possess. The terms of this draft treaty were supposed to be as follows:<sup>43</sup> (1) Subsidy of one lakh per mensem; (2) guarantee of the integrity of the Amir's dominions; (3) if the Russian armies march towards India and pass through Afghanistan, Russia would agree to pay one lakh of rupees every night they stay in Afghanistan; (4) if the Russians succeeded in conquering Punjab, they would give it to the Amir; (5) if the Russians desired to station a garrison at Herat, they would pay rupees five crores in advance; (6) the Russians would consider the enemies of the Amir as their own enemies; (7) the Russians Government would supply considerable amount of arms and

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<sup>43</sup>S.S., Nos. 860/867.

ammunitions to the Amir; and (8) the Russians would pay rupees one crore at once for expenses to the Amir. The Russians also wanted to station their agents at several strategic points in Afghanistan.

Perturbed by the rumours of the Russian agents to Kabul, Lord Loftus, the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg, enquired from the Russian Imperial Government the veracity of the news. M. de Giers' reply was an emphatic 'no'; it was said that neither any such mission had been nor was intended to be sent to Kabul, either by the Government at St. Petersburg or General Kauffmann from Turkestan.<sup>44</sup> The flat denial of the fact of the mission was actually a reaction to the British false assurance of a year earlier pertaining to the nature of the British sponsored Turkish mission,<sup>45</sup> which was, in turn, a response to the Russian 'disclaimer' in regard to the recognition of Abdullah Jan as heir-apparent, 'in contravention' to the Anglo-Russian understanding of 1873, by which the Russians had committed themselves not to interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. However, it shows that both sides were befooling each other and were secretive about their real intentions, which they were not revealing to the other side.

However, the Russian mission under General Stoli-etoff, which was on its way during the negotiations at St. Petersburg, reached Afghanistan in July-August 1878. There are conflicting reports about the manner with which the mission was received at Kabul. It is said that the Amir initially protested against the coming of the mission but took no steps to arrest its advance; and when the Russians came he received them with honour.<sup>46</sup> According to other reports, Shere Ali Khan admitted the Russian mission perforce, as the Russian forces were standing on the passes, while the British Government was not on good terms with the Amir.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Loftus to Salisbury, 3 July 1878.

<sup>45</sup>Singhal, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>46</sup>Lady Betty Balfour, *Lord Lytton's Indian Administration*, pp. 247-48; Duke of Argyll, *The Eastern Question*, II. p. 330.

<sup>47</sup>S.S., No. 27, February 1879.

The reception of the Russian envoy precipitated a crisis. Lord Lytton also decided to send a British mission to Kabul and insisted on Shere Ali Khan to receive it. As it happened, the letter announcing the Viceroy's determination to send a mission was received at Kabul on the same day on which had occurred the death of Abdullah Jan, i.e., August 17. The Amir must have been greatly upset and therefore requested the British Government that the matter be deferred.<sup>48</sup> It is also said that the Amir consulted the Russian envoy on the reception of the British mission. Stolietoff advised Shere Ali not to do so, as 'the presence of the embassies from two different countries in almost hostile relations would not be quite convenient.'<sup>49</sup> The Amir thereupon decided not to admit the British mission, and preferred, to his own disadvantage, the friendship of the 'Imperial Majesty' to that of the 'English Government'.<sup>50</sup>

Actually, for Shere Ali Khan the situation was very delicate and required a very careful handling. He wanted to remain independent of all foreign influences. But the circumstances had compelled him to choose between what one may call 'the devil and the deep sea,'—subservience to the British and the Russians. It may be recalled that it was the Indian Governor General, Lord Mayo, who by not objecting to Kauffmann's correspondence with Shere Ali in 1870, in a way, allowed the Amir to communicate with the Russian Government. But Lord Lytton was altogether a different person from Mayo and Northbrook. He considered it suicidal to allow the Russians to establish themselves at Kabul, as it would have enormously increased Russia's material strength and moral prestige which would have meant a simultaneous decline in British power and influence in Asia, and as a result would have endangered the security of the Indian Empire.<sup>51</sup> Lytton believed that if the British

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<sup>48</sup>Lord Roberts, *op. cit.*, II, p. 113.

<sup>49</sup>S.S. Nos. 22/92. January 1879.

<sup>50</sup>Abdurrahman, *Autobiography*, I, pp. 150-151.

<sup>51</sup>Lord Lytton's Minute on Frontier Policy, 4 September 1878, text in Philips *op. cit.*, 452-55,

left a vacuum of power in Afghanistan, Russia was certain to fill it up.

With the prevention of the British Mission under Sir Neville Chamberlain, by the Afghan troops from entering into Afghanistan, the 'forward policy' was being reincarnated in Lytton's thinking and execution. The Viceroy wanted to take the British frontier upto the Hindu Kush and also take the fertile and strategic province of Herat within the fold of the British Indian Empire.<sup>52</sup> For the fulfilment of this objective, Lytton wanted to divide Afghanistan into several parts, the consequences of which shall be dealt with subsequently.

In the meantime, the Congress of Berlin had established peace in Europe; and the British Cabinet feared that tension in Central Asia might prevent the withdrawal of Russian troops from Turkey. Instructions to Lord Lytton were particularly to insist only on the withdrawal of the Russian mission from Kabul and influence the Amir to establish conditions in which a British mission could with safety reside in Afghanistan.<sup>53</sup> As the tension between India and Afghanistan mounted, General Stolietoff diplomatically left Kabul, as if the aim of the envoy was to create such trouble between the British and the Afghan, and having accomplished that there was no need of his staying back any further.

On the other hand, Lytton could not be stopped from his belligerent posture. He had made up his mind to carry out his forward policy to the full, and extend the Indian frontier to the Hindu Kush. For a *casus belli*, the Viceroy had no dearth of complaints against Shere Ali.

In the proclamation issued on November 21, 1878,<sup>54</sup> the Viceroy presented a long list of grievances against the Amir. Shere Ali was accused of a total lack of gratefulness in return of a host of friendly gestures by the British Government.

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<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup>Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 204, Dispatch from Secretary of State.

<sup>54</sup>Declaration of War, Proclamation of Viceroy Addressed to Amir Shere Ali Khan, Camp At Lahore, 21 November 1878, Appendix XIX.

Whenever the Amir needed, the British Government provided him aid in money and arms, helped him in the fixation of Afghan boundaries with Persia and Russia, particularly the recognition of the Amir's sovereignty over Wakhan and Badakshan by the Emperor of Russia. And, in return to these friendly gestures, apart from other discourtesies shown by the Amir towards the British, a passage to a British officer of rank (D.Forsyth) returning from a friendly country was forbidden through Badakshan and Wakhan. Further, while Afghan subjects enjoyed all facilities of trade and movement throughout the British territories, the British subjects were not only denied these facilities within Afghanistan, but at times were maltreated without protection or redress. More important to Lytton was the Amir's refusal to receive a British mission in Kabul and later on the hostile prevention of a mission under Sir Neville Chamberlain from even entering into Afghanistan, while a Russian mission was being entertained in Kabul, which had a special significance from the nature of the contemporary events in Europe.

It seems that war was declared by Lytton more by making the last grievance a prestige issue. The Viceroy wanted to preclude Russian influence from Afghanistan, in any case; when he failed by peaceful means, he resorted to the arbitrament of the sword.

Ironically enough the Viceroy had tried to take into confidence the Sirdars and the people of Afghanistan. He had declared it clearly that 'upon the Amir Shere Ali Khan alone rests the responsibility of having exchanged the friendship for the hostility of the Empress of India' and that the Government 'has still no quarrel' with Sirdars and people of Afghanistan since they had not given any offence, and therefore promised 'to respect their independence' and not injure or interfere with them.<sup>55</sup>

If the Viceroy was annoyed because of the repulsion of the British mission, it may be recalled here that in 1869, another mission of the same nature had been refused by the

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<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*



Amir on the ground that the Afghan people were against receiving a permanent envoy from any foreign country. And, secondly, considering himself an independent sovereign, the Amir was acting within his rights to receive one mission, temporary in nature, and refuse the other, intended to be permanent and accompanied by sizable armed force.

How suitably Lord Lytton tried to respect the independence of Afghanistan can be judged from the fact that while declaring war on Shere Ali he said: '*Nor will the British Government tolerate interference on the part of any power in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.*' Waging war, perhaps, in Lytton's imagination did not constitute interference !

The Amir rightly feared the introduction of a Resident with a large army escort in his territories, as this was the first step of the British Government in the eventual absorption of practically all the princely states of India.

If the reception of the Russian mission at Kabul had given offence to the British Government, it would have been in the fitness of things that Lord Lytton should have declared war on Russia instead, and should have made her pay for breaking her promise of non-interference in Afghan affairs.<sup>56</sup> To Annie Besant 'every dictate of honour and of courage would have made us strike at the strong aggressor, and not at his helpless tool'.<sup>57</sup> But to Lytton, a war with Russia was both politically impolitic and unfeasible, as well as, militarily impossible for the British Government to undertake.<sup>58</sup>

However, a logical sequence of the British policy of making Afghanistan strong and friendly, serving as a bulwark of India's defence, would have been a direct confrontation with Russia. The war with Shere Ali sought to serve the interests of the Russian policy which desired a weak and divided Afghanistan, so that they might get a chance to meddle in its affairs. Actually, during the war, the British policy came to rest on a division of Afghanistan, which,

<sup>56</sup>Abdurrahman, *op. cit.*, II, p. 263.

<sup>57</sup>Annie Besant, *England, India and Afghanistan*, pp. 95-97.

<sup>58</sup>Lytton's Minute of 4 September 1878.

however, could not fully materialize because of the appearance of Abdurrahman.

The Russian Government was, on the one hand, accusing the British Government of violating the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1855, which was hitherto being followed by Lawrence, Mayo and Northbrook, of non-interference in Afghan affairs.<sup>59</sup> While, on the other hand, the Russians were contemplating taking advantage of the Anglo-Afghan war and ensuring confusion, to claim and even take possession of the districts of Wakhan, Badakshan and Maimana (in the north of Afghanistan) and annex them with their vassal Bokhara.<sup>60</sup> It was also feared that in the British success the Russians were likely to lose a weapon with which they could have injured the former. But the Russians had to reconcile themselves with the British success at Kabul, as it was visualized that a Russian interference in Afghanistan might have led to an Anglo-Russian conflagration in Europe.<sup>61</sup> Thus, it was not deemed advisable for Russia to have intervened on the side of Shere Ali. Anyway, Count Schouvalloff wrote to Lord Salisbury presenting a rationalization of the Stolietoff's mission to Shere Ali :<sup>62</sup>

...the mission was sent...when there was a tension between England and Russia. It is withdrawn due to improved relations. in future it will have no relations with that Government.

After the declaration of war, three British columns were ordered to march towards Afghanistan : one via Khybar under General Sir Sam Browne, the other under General Frederick Roberts (later Lord Roberts) via Kurram Valley, while the third was led by General Donald Stewart to pass through Bolan and Khojak Passes.<sup>63</sup>

Shere Ali Khan had by then realized the impossibility of his position and vainly sought the aid of his Russian

<sup>59</sup>*Agence Russe*, S.S. No. 21, 7 December 1878.

<sup>60</sup>*Novoya Vremia*, S.S. No. 17, 8 December 1878.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, No. 18.

<sup>62</sup>Schouvaloff to Salisbury, 7 December 1878, S.S. No. 90.

<sup>63</sup>For the details of the war see H.B. Hanna, *The Second Afghan War*; H. Hensman, *The Afghan War of 1879-89*; *The Second Afghan War: Official Account*; Sir D. Stewart, *The Second Afghan War*; a precise and compact account can be found in Elliot, *op.cit.*, pp. 29-44.

friends. After releasing his son Yakub Khan, from captivity, the Amir retired towards Central Asia, where he died in early 1879. Yakub Khan was proclaimed the Amir instead. The British, after a swift campaign negotiated with Yakub Khan the Treaty of Gandamak on May 26, 1879.<sup>64</sup> By the terms of the treaty. Amir Yakub Khan agreed to assign to the British the districts of Kurram, Pishin and Sibi; and accepted a permanent British representative at Kabul; and finally, the new Amir promised to conduct his foreign affairs in accordance with the advice of the Viceroy of India. Soon after the bulk of the British forces were withdrawn from Afghanistan.

For the time being, the British Government's forward policy seemingly held its sway. But Yakub Khan could not reign for long. Prolonged imprisonment had vitiated his abilities. Disorder broke out at Kabul in which Sir Louis Cavagnari, the British Envoy, was murdered in September 1879. Hostilities were reopened by the British, after which the abdication of Yakub Khan was accepted. While the British were in search for a new Amir, Abdurrahman Khan, a nephew of Shere Ali, appeared in the north of Afghanistan from his exile in Russian Central Asia.

A new chapter in British-Afghan relations began in 1880.

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<sup>64</sup>Text in R.S. Rastogi, *Indo-Afghan Relations*, Appendix (i), pp. 217-219.

## Diplomacy by Boundary Commissions 1880-1900



Empire's greatest source of anxiety...Afghanistan, lying as it did between the two great rival powers, as the weakest link in an imperfect chain of defence.\*

**S**IRDAR Abdurrahman Khan<sup>1</sup> was not wasting his exile in Central Asia as the guest of the Russian Government. He shrewdly watched the situation in Afghanistan where Sher Ali's defeat and death had left disorder and anarchy. After seeking the permission of his Russian hosts, he set out to seize the opportunity of establishing himself in Afghanistan.

On his entry into Afghanistan, Abdurrahman was accorded an unprecedented welcome as thousands of his countrymen flocked to his camp. Carefully watching his passage through northern Afghanistan was Sir Lepel Griffin, British political agent at Kabul, who lost no time in entering into a correspondence with Abdurrahman with a view to handing him over the charge of the kingdom of Kabul.

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\**Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy, III.*

<sup>1</sup>Son of Amir Afzal Khan and grandson of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan.

Abdurrahman was an astute diplomat. To his own people he did not want to give the impression that he was seeking the throne other than with their support due to the anti-British feeling rampant in the country in the wake of the war. While, to the British, he wanted to assure that his own experience of Russian exile would not come in the way of establishing a friendly equation with the Government of India. Thus, Abdurrahman, in his letter of May 16, 1880,<sup>2</sup> sought clarification from Lepel Griffin on the following points saying that he wanted to assure his people that he stood for their good :

What are to be the boundaries of my dominions ? Would Kandahar be included in them ? Would a European envoy or a British force remain in Afghanistan ? What enemy of the British Government am I expected to repel ? What benefits does the British Government promise to confer on me and my countrymen ? And what services do they expect in return ?

To this, Sir Lepel Griffin sent a cogent reply on June 14.<sup>3</sup> Since the British Government admitted no right of interference by other powers in Afghanistan (with Russia and Persia having pledged to abstain from all political interference in Afghanistan affairs) it was made plain by Griffin that the Kabul ruler could have no political relations with any foreign power other than the British. In return, the British Government promised to aid the ruler of Kabul in repelling an unprovoked aggression on his dominions provided the ruler followed British advice in the conduct of his foreign relations.

Abdurrahman was informed that Kandahar was placed under a separate ruler, except *Pishin* and *Sibi* which were retained as British possessions. The North-western Frontier including the Kurram Valley and Khyber Pass were already retained by the British under the Treaty of Gandamak of May 26, 1879 with ex-Amir Yakub Khan, and were declared non-negotiable by Griffin.<sup>4</sup> Apart from these reservations, the Kabul ruler was allowed by the British Government to

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<sup>2</sup>See text in Abdurrahman, *op. cit.*, I, p. 193.

<sup>3</sup>Text in Appendix XX (a).

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*



establish his rule on all the territories which were under the former rulers of Afghanistan including Herat.

Finally, the British Government declared its intention not to interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, nor to insist on the maintenance of any English agent. For the convenience of friendly intercourse, however, it was suggested that a Muslim Indian agent of the British Government might be stationed in Afghanistan with mutual agreement.<sup>5</sup>

In his reply of June 22, Abdurrahman Khan accepted the conditions as laid down by Sir Lepel Griffin pertaining to British control of Afghan foreign relations and the stationing of British Muslim agent in Afghanistan, but he shrewdly avoided to mention the controversial question of separating Kandahar from his domain or the territories annexed by the British.<sup>6</sup>

Later, in a conference from July 30 to August 1, held at Zimma near Kabul, Abdurrahman asked Griffin for a formal agreement in writing on the part of the British Government which he could show to his people to gain their support. Abdurrahman was conscious of the nature of his people and until he was fully enthroned, he could not risk British support at the cost of Afghan suspicion.

Griffin and his government were more than anxious to transfer power to Abdurrahman, to whom was given a 'Memorandum of Obligations.'<sup>7</sup> This document contained about the same terms as that of Griffin's letter of June 14, and more : It recognised Abdurrahman Khan as 'Amir of Afghanistan.'

Within a year of assuming power at Kabul, Abdurrahman was able to add both Kandahar and Herat to his dominions. Ayub Khan, a son of Amir Shere Ali Khan, who was at the time in control of Herat, marched towards

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<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>Abdurrahman to Griffin, 22 June 1880, Appendix XX (b).

<sup>7</sup>Griffin to Abdurrahman, 31 July 1880, *vide* Appendix XX (c); See details of negotiations in Snighal *op. cit.*, pp. 67-73 as how eventually the new Viceroy, Lord Ripon, after considerable hesitation, came around to accept Abdurrahman as the Amir.

Kandahar and routed a British army at the Battle of Maiwand.<sup>8</sup> The British consequently withdrew from Kandahar (April 21, 1881), and handed it over to Abdurrahman, who successfully fought and defeated Ayub Khan at Girish (September 1881).<sup>9</sup>

While marching from Kabul to Kandahar, Abdurrahman had instructed his chief in Turkestan, Sirdar Kudus Khan, to march upon Herat which was sure to have been left insufficiently guarded by Ayub during his absence. Kudus Khan occupied Herat. Ayub eventually fled to Persia, thus making Abdurrahman the master of entire Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup>

## (ii) Reversal of Lytton's Policy (1880-84)

Lytton's Afghan War was exercising a telling influence on Disraeli's Conservative Government. The Liberal Opposition led by Gladstone got hold of a forceful whip with which to flog the Government in a previously undisclosed deficit of about fourteen million pounds in the cost of war. For the Indian Government the total estimated loss was of twenty million pounds, plus three thousand soldiers.<sup>11</sup>

In the forthcoming general elections in Britain, the Afghan Policy was made an issue by Gladstone in one of his eloquent speeches.<sup>12</sup>

Remember, the sanctity of life in the hill villages of Afghanistan among the winter snows is as inviolable in the eye of the Almighty God as can be your own. Remember that He who has united you as human beings in the same flesh and blood, has bound you by the law of mutual love, is not limited by the shores of this island is not limited by the bounds of Christian civilization; that it passes over the whole surface of the earth, and embraces the meanest alongwith the greatest in its unmeasured scope.

<sup>8</sup>Dodwell, H.H., *Camb. History of India*, vi, p. 422 (It was in July 1880).

<sup>9</sup>Abdurrahman, I, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-15.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>Fletcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 137 and 141.

<sup>12</sup>Midlothian speech, quoted in Griffiths, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

Gladstone won his liberal party a big majority in the elections and formed the Government in April 1880. The Government started with a bias against their predecessor's policy of the Afghan War. Lord Hartington the new Secretary of State for India, labelled Lytton as 'the incarnation and embodiment of an Indian policy which is everything which the Indian policy should not have been'.<sup>13</sup> Hartington's estimate of the war was even more severe.<sup>14</sup>

...it appears that as the result of two successful campaigns, of the employment of an enormous force, and of the expenditure of large sums of money, all that has yet been accomplished has been the disintegration of the state which it was desired to see strong, friendly and independent, the assumption of fresh and unwelcome liabilities in regard to one of its provinces, and a condition of anarchy throughout the remainder of the country.

He also feared that if Lytton was allowed to continue as Viceroy he would do some 'mischief'.<sup>15</sup> Lord Lytton, realizing that his position had become untenable, resigned in deference to the change of Government at London.

Underlying this change of Government was the controversy among the British officials in regard to the frontier policy. On the one side were the advocates of the forward policy—Sir W. Merewether, Sir Henry Rawlinson, Lord Napier, and more importantly, Sir Frere Bartle—who supported Lytton in extending the frontier to its so-called 'scientific limits' and the retention of Kandahar.<sup>16</sup> While there were Sir Henry Norman and General Wolseley, who opposed the 'spirited' policy and asked for patient adherence to the policy of Canning, Mayo and Lawrence, and saw in it the only promise of establishing relations with Afghanistan on a satisfactory footing.<sup>17</sup> It was finally decided that the true defence of India consisted not in the acquisition of strategic positions at a greater or less distance from the Indian frontier, 'nor in a competition with any other

<sup>13</sup>Quoted in Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 447.

<sup>14</sup>Cited in Fraser-Tytler, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>15</sup>*Vide* Singhal, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>16</sup>Dharm Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 28; also *The Statesman*, 24 March 1879.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

power for influence in Central Asia, but the good government of India, the development of her resources, and the perfecting of the military organization and efficiency of her army'.<sup>18</sup> This decision of the British Cabinet which was conveyed by Hartington to Ripon, was a vindication of Lord Lawrence's policy. Even Disraeli, the chief exponent of British Imperialism, had to confess that the keys of India were not in Herat and Kandahar, but in Westminster.<sup>19</sup>

In spite of the adverse criticism of Lytton, it must be acknowledged that the Second Afghan War, like the first, was a British Victory over the Russians. The British intervention forestalled the Russian attempt to extend their influence upto the British frontier. In a way, it also ensured the survival of Afghanistan. The forward policy was also not dead and gone. It was successively pursued by three Viceroys—Dufferin, Lansdowne and Elgin. The Indian Government steadily tightened its control over the tribal belt on the Indo-Afghan frontier; and there was intermittent dialogue between the British and the Russians concerning the Afghan frontiers and the extent of their influence over the Kingdom of Kabul. With cool and patient methods, the British eventually succeeded in keeping Afghanistan beyond the sphere of Russian influence.

### (iii) The Panjdeh Incident (1885)

The ostensible objects of the British policy had been to make Afghanistan strong, friendly and independent. The first aim had certainly not been accomplished in the early 1880s and success in respect of the other two was even doubtful. Nevertheless, the British hoped that by their much laboured 'patience, conciliation and subsidies' they might eventually heal the traumatic memories of the war. It seemed within the pale of realization; but soon enough the spectre of Russian expansion once more started haunting the minds of the policy-makers of British India.

The British had earlier sought an agreement with Russia on the northern frontiers of Afghanistan and did

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<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

succeed in 1873 in having accepted by the Russian Government the river Oxus as broadly the limits of Afghan territory. But the frontier was not delimited on the spot, was incomplete, and due to its vagueness was indefinite and had left room for misunderstanding. Therefore, both the British and the Afghans stirred up on any new Russian advance in Central Asia.<sup>20</sup>

To provide against the Russian advance, the Amir was to be strengthened; and for that his demands for ammunitions and money were to be acceded to. Anglo-Afghan relations became closer by the appointment of an Afghan Envoy at Calcutta and of a British Agent at Kabul. The Amir, with the help of the British arms and money had, to some extent, restored law and order in his country. But his troops were in no position to be called to protect the northern frontiers against Russia. Consequently, the Amir wrote to the Viceroy, in October 1882, firstly, to get his frontiers with Russia properly delimited as he could not protect them with his ill-equipped troops. Secondly, he hinted on his incapacity to raise and equip an army strong enough to withstand a Russian onslaught, implying that he should be given further aid in the interest of the security of India.<sup>21</sup>

Lord Ripon postponed sending an immediate reply to this letter, but in February 1883 he renewed the assurance given to the Amir in July 1880 against any unprovoked foreign aggression. The Amir was very grateful on obtaining the assurance he desired. But he was not fully satisfied with this plain speaking of the Viceroy. He wanted positive proof of the British pledges by signing a treaty with them, which had been evaded and delayed since 1880. However, his resentment was effectively removed by the grant of twelve lakhs of rupees annually for the payment of his troops and the defence of his frontiers. Probably this was done by Lord Ripon so that if the Amir was unable to maintain peace on his borders in

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<sup>20</sup>Abdurrahman, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-128.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 150-151; also *Novoye Vremia*, vide S.E., 120, 24, 18 December 1883.



face of a Russian threat, the British position would become delicate as well as embarrassing. He considered a direct approach to Russia as more appropriate than a treaty with the Amir. While offering the subsidy, Ripon wrote sympathetically of the unusual difficulties with which the Amir was faced on his northern frontiers. He also reiterated the British promise of help and support against unprovoked attack. Abdurrahman was satisfied and said that he would be loyal to his pledges. He stated that he no longer desired a treaty with the British Government. He had gained what he wanted for the time being.<sup>22</sup>

In spite of British assurances, Abdurrahman remained nervously conscious of the Russian activities on his borders. The British official thinking was also coming round to the view that the Government at London should take up the question of defining and delimiting the northern frontiers of Afghanistan. This, it was emphasized, could be done by concluding an Anglo-Russian agreement in the form of a definite treaty.<sup>23</sup> By the time the British Government could make any move, the Russians occupied Merv, and pushed into the Valley of Murghab. This news was received with great alarm at Kabul, Calcutta and London, as Merv was considered a place of considerable strategic importance.<sup>24</sup> And the intensity of feeling prevalent in England was pleasantly called as 'Mervousness' by the Duke of Argyll.<sup>25</sup>

The main reason of British disquiet was that Russia had, time and again, assured the British Government that Merv lay beyond the Russian sphere of influence.<sup>26</sup> After the occupation of Merv, the British and the Afghans were not sure whether the Russians could any more be trusted in regard to the territorial integrity of Afghanistan; they wanted to get the Russian promises translated into some tacit agreement.

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<sup>22</sup>Sykes, *Afghanistan*, II, p. 159.

<sup>23</sup>Sykes, *Sir Mortimer Durand*, p. 135.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>Thornton to Granville, 15 February 1884.

<sup>26</sup>Michell's Memorandum, Sec. No. 10/13, June 1885; see also Adye, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45.

The Gladstone Government was known to consist of the 'doves' who were generally known to be soft in dealing with Russia, and therefore, were not considered amenable to take precipitate action on the instigation of the 'hawkish' English press of that time.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, Lord Granville, the Foreign Secretary, thought it necessary to inform the Russian Ambassador, Baron Mohrenheim, that the news of the absorption of Merv was not received by the British Government with indifference, but to the contrary.<sup>28</sup> Granville also despatched a note to St. Petersburg about the British reactions to the Russian advance, which enlisted a catalogue of Russian promises against expansion towards Afghanistan made since 1873. The note asked the Russian Government to state in unambiguous terms their further designs, schemes and proposals, if any, towards the Afghan frontier and Afghanistan proper itself.<sup>29</sup>

In reply,<sup>30</sup> the Russian Government justified the incorporation of Merv. It was said that the chiefs of Merv had themselves requested the protection of the Imperial Government, and what precisely the Russians Government had done was to exercise her 'freedom of decision' in accepting the voluntary submission. And for avoiding future misunderstanding, the Russians in their note suggested to the British Cabinet completion of arrangements of a more exact definition of the territories separating the Russian possessions from those of the Amir of Afghanistan.

It may be recalled that the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1872-73 had left the Afghan boundary between Khojah Saleh and Heri Rud without proper delimitations. The negotiations which were started on the Russian initiative in early 1882 discontinued without results. British suspicion of Russian motivations was strengthened by what happened to Merv. Now the British felt the need of such a precise and accurate delimitation of Afghan frontiers, as well as, Russian sphere

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<sup>27</sup>Argyll, *op.cit.*, II, p. 370.

<sup>28</sup>Granville to Thornton, 28 February 1884.

<sup>29</sup>Granville to Thornton, 29 February 1884.

<sup>30</sup>Giers to Thornton, 29 March 1884.

of influence, that its contravention by the Russians should become not only difficult but impossible to hide.<sup>31</sup>

The British, however, were correctly anticipating further Russian moves towards Afghanistan. Soon after the annexation of Merv, the War Officer at St. Petersburg released a new map which showed the boundaries of Merv stretching southward to the Heri Rud and touching that river near Herat.<sup>32</sup> The British thinking had long been sensitively alive to the strategic importance of Herat for the safety of India. Reports had further reached London that Russian agents were operating in the districts of Panjdeh and Maimaneh<sup>33</sup>—the territories which were considered to be parts of Afghanistan—Maimaneh was even mentioned in the Agreement of 1873. The British apprehended that the Russian moves were directed towards Herat. To stall the Russian expansion and to remove the sources of friction the British became more than eager to accept the Russian proposal for the delimitation of Afghan frontier and suggested that the principal points in the boundary should be laid down on the spot by a joint commission consisting of the British, the Russian and the Afghan representatives.<sup>34</sup>

The Russians accepted the need of delimitation through a joint commission in principle, but raised objections to the inclusion of an Afghan commissioner and the suggested meeting place of the commission at Sarakhs.<sup>35</sup> They also urged the British Government to come to an understanding in advance through an exchange of views on the general basis of delimitation so as to avoid any misunderstanding which might cause hindrance in the work of the commission.<sup>36</sup> The Russians were of the view that in the delimitation an ethnical rather than a geographical basis should be

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<sup>31</sup>Granville to Thornton, 22 February 1882; and Holditch, *Indian Borderland*, p. 95.

<sup>32</sup>Thornton to Granville, 26 March 1884.

<sup>33</sup>Granville to Thornton, 24 April 1884.

<sup>34</sup>Granville to Thornton, 29 April 1884.

<sup>35</sup>Giers to Thornton, 3 May and 18 June 1884.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

adopted—the former basis suited the Russians, while the latter was desired by the British and the Afghans.<sup>37</sup> The underlying reason for the Russian demand was that they had already subjugated the Tekke Turkomans, and therefore could easily contend that in the interest of peace and tranquillity of the Turkoman country all the Turkomans should be brought under one rule—that of Russia—otherwise, the nomadic habits of the Turkomans would cause friction between Russia and Afghanistan.<sup>38</sup>

The British Government was eager to settle the Afghan boundary with Russia as soon as possible. They appointed Sir Peter Lumsden, an experienced officer and a member of the India Council, as their representative on the boundary commission, the Russians named General Zelenoi.<sup>39</sup> However, it was not easy to get the commission start its work immediately as the Russians had other aims in view. When Lumsden arrived on the arranged spot (Sarakh) at the end of the year 1884, he did not find his Russian counterpart, who, it was said, could not make it due to his alleged illness. Instead, Lumsden observed, some forty miles south of Sarakh, a pocket of Russian soldiers at Pul-i-Khatun.<sup>40</sup> Thus, with the approaching winter, the work of the commission was to be postponed to the following spring.

Making full use of the intervening period, the Russians put before the British a number of proposals, specifically including their claim that Panjdeh, which was regarded by the British as lying within the Afghan sphere, should be independent.<sup>41</sup> This fertile territory was inhabited by the Turkomans, and it seems that the Russians, by the logic of their former ethnical argument, desired it to be included in their own sphere of influence. The Russian claims were accompanied by complaints of Afghan encroachments on

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<sup>37</sup>Chamberlain to Dilke, Polt. B., 1884.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup>Lumsden to Granville, 9 November 1884.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup>Granville to Thornton, 9 December 1884.

the Turkoman territories.<sup>41</sup> Lord Granville expressed his view that all such questions should be settled by the boundary commission itself while the Russians insisted that the activities of the commission should be limited to a particular zone, which was to be determined by negotiations between London and St. Petersburg. With the passage of time the differences between the two powers increased to such an extent that apparently it seemed that the task of delimitation would never begin at all.

In the meantime, Russian forces had been advancing along the Afghan frontier, taking position near Panjdeh and establishing a post at Pul-i-Khatun and finally occupying the strategic Zulfiqar pass. They refused to withdraw from these advanced positions;<sup>43</sup> and due to their proximity with the Afghan troops, the British feared an armed conflict. M. de Giers assurance that a clash would not occur unless the Afghans attacked first<sup>44</sup>, could not be accepted by the British Cabinet as they knew that the Afghans were becoming increasingly restive and would not be inclined to allow any further Russian advance without resistance.<sup>45</sup> By March 1885, when the situation had become rather acute, Queen Victoria, keen to avert the conflict, used her personal influence and wired the Tsar, on March 4, to do every thing possible to avoid conflict.<sup>46</sup>

Sensing the gravity of the situation, the Indian Government was also instructed by the Cabinet to keep its troops in readiness for the defence of Herat;<sup>47</sup> and Lumsden was informed that the British Government desired the Afghans to resist any further Russian advance.<sup>48</sup>

As the tension was mounting and the possibility of war between British and Russia was also being talked about. Sir Edward Thornton, British Ambassador at

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<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup>Adye, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>44</sup>Thornton to Granville, 5 March 1885.

<sup>45</sup>Lumsden to Granville, 1 March 1885.

<sup>46</sup>Fitzmaurice, *Life of Lord Granville*, II, p. 424.

<sup>47</sup>Granville to Viceroy, 7 March 1885.

<sup>48</sup>Holditch, *op. cit.*, p. 130.



St. Petersburg, informed M. de Giers on March 14, that a Russian attack on Panjdeh might lead to serious consequences, beside putting an end to the negotiations between the two powers.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the Imperial Government was served with a sort of ultimatum on March 28 that any attempt by the Russian troops to approach or occupy Herat would constitute a *casus belli* for Her Majesty's Government.<sup>50</sup>

To this the Russian reply was quite evasive : on the one hand, de Giers said that he had no knowledge about the Russian troops attacking Panjdeh; while he categorically denied that his Government had any intention of moving on Herat.<sup>51</sup>

But the apprehended clash did occur on March 30. In November 1884, Sir Peter Lumsden had made the Afghans believe that the Russians were not likely to attack until the boundary commission was working.<sup>52</sup> The Afghans tactlessly, therefore, crossed the controversial *Khusk* river and took positions at Panjdeh. The Russian General Komarov asked the Afghans to withdraw from these positions, which the Afghan General Shamsuddin refused to do. The Russians captured Panjdeh after defeating the Afghans in a skirmish and driving away their remaining troops.<sup>53</sup> In fact, Panjdeh was inhabited by Turkomans and the Russian claim over it could be justified as the Afghans had only recently appeared there to stall the Russian claim.<sup>54</sup> Abdurrahman, having an alibi to be with Lord Ripon in India at the time of the clash, did not have much to say then nor even in his autobiography.

From another point of view, the battle was the inevitable result of a long and premeditated expansive movement to which the Russians were committed and from which it was hardly possible for them to desist. And when

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<sup>49</sup>*Vide* Tytler, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup>Macmunn, *Afghanistan*, p. 210.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup>Sykes, *Afghanistan*, II, p. 163,

the news reached St. Petersburg, Sir Edward Thornton, the British Ambassador, thought that war was inevitable.<sup>55</sup> To the British Premier, Gladstone, it looked like an unprovoked aggression by the Russians on the Afghans; he proposed a vote of credit of six million and a half pounds to meet the preparations rendered necessary by the incident of Panjdeh<sup>56</sup>. The severity of British reaction can be gauged from the very tone of Gladstone:

Whose was the provocation is a matter of the utmost consequence. We only know that the attack was a Russian attack. We know that the Afghans suffered in life, in spirit, and in repute. We know that a blow was struck at the credit and the authority of a sovereign—our protected ally—who had committed no offence. All I say is, we cannot in that state of affairs close this book and say "We will look into it no more." We must do our best to have right done in the matter.

Amir Abdurrahman's reaction to the whole incident was rather cool and unperturbed. At that time he was attending the Durbar of the Viceroy at Rawalpindi.<sup>57</sup> He apparently attached very little importance to the loss sustained by the Afghans in terms of men, material and prestige. Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy, had reiterated to the Amir the pledge of the British Government to support him in case of external aggression, and had promised the Amir more financial assistance for strengthening his defences.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps, it was because of the Viceroy's assurances that the Amir believed that the British Government would set everything right in the matter.

In Russia, there was jubilation over the incident, the Russian press showing bellicosity towards Great Britain; while one of the leading journals, the *Navosty*, took for granted that Russian expansion could not recede, but must press on to seize Herat and thereby 'pierce a window' looking southwards. Herat was considered a convenient halting-place for further advance towards the Indian Ocean in

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<sup>55</sup>Thornton to Granville, 7 April 1885.

<sup>56</sup>Speech of 9 April 1885, House of Commons Debate, 294, p. 164.

<sup>57</sup>Noyce, *England, India and Afghanistan*, p. 137.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid*; see also A.G.A. Durand, *The Making of a Frontier*, 146,

the fulfilment of Russia's historical destiny.<sup>59</sup> This belligerent view was not, however, shared by the Imperial Government. They had no intention of moving on Herat.<sup>60</sup> The Russian Ambassador in London strove hard to preserve peace during the crisis. He sought to 'assist the Liberals to retain office at the cost of something less than war,'<sup>61</sup> at the same time apprising his Government of the seriousness of British intentions.<sup>62</sup>

#### (iv) Delimitation of the Russo-Afghan frontier (1885-88)

The British Government put up a proposal with the concurrence of Abdurrahman Khan that if the Amir gave up Panjdeh, he should then be allowed to retain the Zulfiqar Pass. This the Russians gladly welcomed, since, according to their own authorities, the possession of the Zulfiqar Pass would have no great value for them. The Imperial Government was least inclined to go to war with Great Britain on this issue, and more so if their objects could be achieved peacefully.<sup>63</sup>

One specific demand of the British Government concerning the Panjdeh incident was that there should be an enquiry into the conduct of the Russian General Komarov.<sup>64</sup> The Gladstone Cabinet was too much pressed at home to insist on the enquiry. The Tsar accepted the enquiry in principle after Granville's tacit assurance to M. de Staal that the British Government's insistence on the matter was simply to mollify the aroused public opinion at home; and it was not their intention to subject 'valiant officers to trial.'<sup>65</sup> The arbitration was agreed to, but there was difference of opinion with regard to the choice of the arbitrator. Granville wanted the German Emperor, but had to acquiesce to

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<sup>59</sup>Correspondence respecting the Demarcation of North-western Afghanistan, III, pp. 43-60.

<sup>60</sup>Giers to Staal, 20 April 1885.

<sup>61</sup>*Camb. Hist. of Br. Empire*, V, p. 424.

<sup>62</sup>Staal to Giers, 22 April 1885.

<sup>63</sup>Staal to Giers, 15 April 1885; Noyce, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>64</sup>Giers to Staal, 28 April 1885.

<sup>65</sup>Staal to Giers, 5 May 1885.

the Russian choice of the King of Denmark.<sup>66</sup> The arbitration actually never took place, having served its purpose for the Gladstone Government, which itself could not survive much longer.<sup>67</sup>

A change of government had occurred in Great Britain in June 1885: Gladstone had resigned after his defeat on a budget question in the Commons, and Lord Salisbury had formed a Conservative Government. After strenuous negotiations with the Russians on the question as to how far to the north of the Zulfiqar Pass should the Afghan frontier lie,<sup>68</sup> the Salisbury Government was able to effect a compromise. The Anglo-Russian agreement was incorporated in a protocol which was signed by Salisbury and Staal on September 10.<sup>69</sup>

Salisbury had to resign in favour of Gladstone in February 1886, to again come to power after Gladstone was once more defeated in August 1886, this time on the question of Irish Home Rule. It was during this second Salisbury Government that the question of the North-western frontier of Afghanistan was finally settled on the basis of the September 1885 Protocol.

For the delimitation of frontier on the spot, Colonel Ridgeway was appointed in place of Sir Peter Lumsden, whose relations with the British Government were no longer amicable as a result of the Panjdeh incident on which he had favoured immediate declaration of war on Russia and for which he was rebuked by Granville. The Russians also replaced Zelenoi, and appointed in his place Colonel Kuhlberg.

The reconstituted commission started its work from Zulfiqar Pass on Heri Rud river at the end of the year 1885 and continued till the summer of 1886, when the group reached near Khojah Saleh on Amu Darya (the Oxus). But due to differences, an agreement could not be found on the

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<sup>66</sup>Fitzmaurice, *op. cit.*, pp. 442-443.

<sup>67</sup>*Camb. Hist. of India*, pp. 423-425.

<sup>68</sup>Salisbury to Thornton, 1 July 1885; and Holditch, *op. cit.*, p. 146,

<sup>69</sup>Text of the Protocol in Appendix XXI,

exact location of the frontier. The two Governments decided to withdraw their commissioners, and decide the pending questions, on the basis of the data collected, through direct negotiations between themselves.<sup>70</sup> Military opinion in Russia was opposed to any settlement. The British authorities were also not hopeful of any further success when Col. Ridgeway and party reached St. Petersburg. The only redeeming feature was the Tsar, who was in favour of the settlement being effected. The British representative had to overcome a tough diplomatic opposition. The settlement was considered a loss of prestige for the 'Russian War Party' at St. Petersburg. After resolving the differences, a final Protocol was signed by Colonel Ridgeway and M. Zinovieff at St. Petersburg on July 22, 1887. The remaining task of local demarcation on the spot was performed by a Mixed Commission, chief members of which were Lt. Colonel Yate and Captain Komarov, and the agreement was made definitive by an exchange of notes between the British and the Russian Government on June 2, 1888.<sup>71</sup>

Thus the north-western frontier of Afghanistan was finally established after a long period of diplomatic bargaining between London and St. Petersburg. The actual work of delimitation on the spot in terms of technical execution took almost four years. The idea was first mooted by the agreement of 1873, and its procedure was adopted in the subsequent delimitations.

All the three parties were more or less satisfied, although the British had to make sizable concession to Russia at the cost of Afghanistan. The Russians were more than gratified for their extended frontier upto the very threshold of Afghanistan. Amir Abdurrahman, who had willingly requested the British to strike a deal with the Russians on the question, expressed his approval of the transaction, and thanked all those who had added such

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<sup>70</sup>Parl. Papers, 1887, Vol. 63, p. 166.

<sup>71</sup>Protocol Parl. Papers, 1888, Vol. 77, pp. 2-3; see also Singhal, *op. cit.*, p. 127,



a measure of definiteness to his territorially uncertain dominions.<sup>72</sup> Actually, the Amir was not pleased with Colonel Ridgeway in the beginning, and the Afghans had obstructed the Commission's work. The change in the Afghan attitude came when the boundary was finally fixed.

**(v) Settlement over the Pamirs (1888-1895).**

There was a general belief among the people that with the agreement of the Russo-Afghan frontier from the Heri Rud to Khojah Saleh\* by the Protocol of 1885 (and the subsequent demarcations), all the border questions between the two countries were finally settled. But scarcely had Lord Lansdowne taken over as Viceroy from Lord Dufferin in 1888 that the question cropped up regarding the supposedly inaccessible zone of the Pamirs.

By the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1873, the northern limits of Afghanistan were quite vaguely agreed to due to lack of precise geographical knowledge of the territories defined.<sup>73</sup> In 1888, the demarcation between the Heri Rud and the Oxus, left the Russo-Afghan frontier between Khojah Saleh and the Pamirs largely indeterminate. This undemarcated boundary was vaguely understood to rest on the river Oxus, the region which consisted of the unexplored lofty heights of some twenty-two thousand feet above the sea level of the area known as the 'Roof of the World,' which the British believed to be a natural barrier against the attack, and absolutely impassable. Amir Abdurrahman, however, did not share the British belief. In 1885, he had urged Lord Dufferin at Rawalpindi that the British should occupy the Pamirs in order to forestall its occupation by the Russians.<sup>74</sup>

The Russians had been active in the Pamirs for quite sometime. In 1876, a Russian officer, Skobeloff, had led an expedition to the Alai Mountains and annexed the northern

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<sup>72</sup>Abdurrahman to Viceroy, 16 August 1887; Abdurrahman, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 152-153.

\*Abdurrahman calls it Khwajah Salar, which seems to be the correct name of the place, *vide* his *Autobiography*, II, p. 131.

<sup>73</sup>Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia*, p. 297.

<sup>74</sup>Abdurrahman, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

part of the Pamir region for the Russian Empire.<sup>75</sup> From then onwards the Russians remained busy in exploring the sources of the Oxus and gathering rare geographical knowledge for the benefit of the Imperial Government.<sup>76</sup> Their exploration took a Cossack officer, Grombchevsky, to the northern borders of Kashmir.<sup>77</sup> All this did not come to the notice of the British till the end of 1891 when a British officer of the Intelligence Department, Captain Younghusband, was expelled from Bazai Gumbaz in the Wakhan Valley by a Russian force under Colonel Yanoff.<sup>78</sup> Some days later, another British officer was arrested by Yanoff. And, about the same time, the Russians had expelled not only a Chinese party from the Pamirs, but had also ordered the massacre of an Afghan force.<sup>79</sup> The struggle of the Pamirs was in full swing.

The British Government received the expulsion of Younghusband with consternation, and denounced it as a breach of the Russian promises as well as an infringement of the boundary lines agreed to in 1873.<sup>80</sup> The British contention was that the Russians could not lay claim to the territories lying south of the river Oxus, in accordance with the above agreement; and, therefore, the Russian officer had 'violated the elementary principles of international law', while dealing with the British and the Afghan officers.<sup>81</sup>

The strong British stand on the question and the Indian Government's punitive measures against certain chiefs near the Pamirs, brought immediate results. The so-called Central Asian question was reopened in 1892. The Anglo-Russian negotiations, though acrimonious and protracted at first, eventually paved the way for the two imperial nations for a sort of colonial conciliation.

<sup>75</sup>Vambery, 'Russia, India and Afghanistan', *Quarterly Review*, October 1907.

<sup>76</sup>Curzon, 'Pamirs and the Source of the Oxus', *Geographical Magazine* 8, 1896.

<sup>77</sup>Roberts, *Forty One Years in India*, II, p.446; *Annual Register*, 1892, pp. 243-244.

<sup>78</sup>Morier to Giers, 25 January 1892.

<sup>79</sup>*Vide* Singhal, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>80</sup>L. Roberts, *op. cit.*, II, p. 446.

<sup>81</sup>Morier to Giers, 25 January 1892.

During the years 1892-1895, the developments in the internal situation of Russia were also interesting. There were two conflicting view points in the Government: one desiring a peaceful and conciliatory approach in the foreign policy in general and the Pamirs question in particular. This group can be termed as 'internationalist' which mostly crowded the Russian Foreign Office. The other group's standpoint was, by and large, governed by 'immediate practicability and expediency,' and was expansive. In a more clear cut fashion than before, the pressure of the second group—'the militarists'—was being felt on the peaceable policies of the Foreign Office. This revealed a changing trend in Russian foreign policy,<sup>82</sup> which seems to be largely due to the coming to power, after the death of Alexander III, of a new and less able group of Ministers, and which marked a break in the 'methodic cautiousness' that was typical of the Central Asian policy under Gorchakov and Giers.<sup>83</sup> This conflict in aims and objectives between the Russian Ministries of War and Foreign Affairs is clearly brought out in the correspondence of M. de Staal, the Russian Ambassador to London. The Russian controversy was matched by a political crisis in England, as a result of which the Liberals under Gladstone had come to power, with Lord Rosebery as Foreign Secretary. Rosebery showed very little interest in the Pamirs and was more amenable to negotiations.<sup>84</sup>

Gradually, during the negotiations, the desirability of effecting a *delimitation legale* in the new zone of contention was acutely felt on the two sides.<sup>85</sup> Both Giers and Morier were in agreement that a commission should settle the frontiers and the spheres of influence, over which there had developed much tension and excitement.<sup>86</sup>

However, the demarcation was not an easy job, as the Russians wanted to delay its accomplishment in order to get time to extend their possessions and present the British

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<sup>82</sup>L. Roberts, *op. cit.*, II, p. 181.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup>Staal to Giers, 23 August 1892.

<sup>85</sup>Morier to Giers, 25 January 1892.

<sup>86</sup>Giers to Morier, 29 January 1892.

with a *fait accompli*. During the Anglo-Russian discussions, the Russian Foreign Office, under the pressure of the 'militarists', accepted in principle, in the summer of 1892, to establish Russian dominion over the whole of the Pamirs.<sup>87</sup> Staal immediately reacted against this. He saw the danger to friendly Anglo-Russian relations inherent in such a Russian enterprise, and advocated to his government the avoidance of any provocation in the disputed area over which negotiations were being held,<sup>88</sup> Staal counselled his government for continuing the dialogue with the British, and preventing the Russian troops from any untoward action against the Afghans.<sup>89</sup> The Russian Ambassador felt that some demands of the Russian War Office could be accommodated, as the political crisis in England was likely to obscure the fact of the Russian advance *dans la region des Pamirs*.<sup>90</sup>

When questioned, Staal explained to the British Foreign Secretary, Rosebery, that the Russian advance was mainly due to prevent the Chinese encroachments *dans ces parages*.<sup>91</sup> The Russians also emphasised that the frontiers of the two powers should not meet, as this was the only way to avoid conflict, and to establish *securite reciproque*.<sup>92</sup> It was not only the Russians who continued to think in terms of a buffer state separating their own possessions from those of the British. Lord Kimberley, Secretary of State for India, considered the proximity of the dominions of the two powers, brought about by the Russian advance into the Pamirs, as productive of *alarme a chaque pas et de continuel froissement*.<sup>93</sup> He was of the opinion that the unnecessary friction could be avoided by goodwill and a spirit of conciliation.<sup>94</sup> Staal replied that his government was in

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<sup>87</sup>Staal to Giers, 12 July 1892.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup>Staal to Chichkine, 27 July 1892.

<sup>90</sup>Staal to Giers, 9 August 1892.

<sup>91</sup>Staal to Giers, 23 August 1892.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup>Staal to Chichkine, (October 1892 p. 229)

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*

perfect agreement with Kimberley, and had ordered its men to remain within the limits established by their 'exterior arrangements' and only to protect their newly acquired territories.<sup>95</sup>

Early in 1893, the British Government was subjected to a severe public and parliamentary indictment for its 'secret diplomacy' and for indifference to the Pamirs question.<sup>96</sup> Lord Rosebery, therefore, showed impatience for the conclusion of an agreement with the Imperial Government.<sup>97</sup> He asked the British Ambassador, Sir Robert Morier to impress upon the Russian Government for the despatch of a mixed commission to the Pamirs, as soon as the winter was over; and if the Russians refused to cooperate, the British would not hesitate to do it by themselves alone.<sup>98</sup> Staal countered this suggestion by hinting that the Russian Government would then be obliged to reserve for themselves full liberty of action in case of British unilateralism.<sup>99</sup> There was considerable consultation between the Foreign and War offices at St. Petersburg, in which Staal was called from London and helped Giers, Chichkine and Kapnist in exercising a moderating influence on the 'hawks' of the Russian War Ministry.<sup>100</sup> After Staal's negotiations with Rosebery in London, the British Government moderated its earlier statement threatening to go it alone concerning the *commission britannique d'exploration dans les contrées du Pamir*. This change in British attitude was also due to the receipt of an assurance from the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg that the Imperial Government would not despatch any further expedition to the Pamirs during the negotiations.<sup>101</sup>

During the negotiations the British Government took the stand that they were prone not to admit that all

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<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup>*Hansard*, IV Series, 1893, VII, pp. 673-674, and xi, p. 1775; also Staal to Chichkine, 25 January 1893.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup>Staal to Chichkine, 3 May 1893.



territories which were outside the limits of Afghanistan were *ipso facto*, within the Russian sphere.<sup>102</sup> Although, Staal was inclined to accept the British line of argument,<sup>103</sup> Count Kapnist was not. He asserted the Russian rights under the 1873 agreement and asked if there was any territory which did not appertain to Afghanistan, under whose influence did it fall if not of Russia.<sup>104</sup> Since the possessions of Britain and Russia were approaching each other in a manner that might have involved conflict, it was thought necessary that their *liberte reciproque* should be limited by means of an *entente commune*.<sup>105</sup>

As the conversations and correspondence continued, the Russian Government opposed the British demand over the territories to the north of Hindukush, as it would constitute a menace against Russia's vulnerable frontiers.<sup>106</sup> But the Russians believed that the British would not enter into a conflict with them over the Pamir question; and the settlement required patience on both sides till the negotiations continued.

In September 1893 Lord Lansdowne despatched a mission led by Sir Mortimer Durand to Kabul for the purpose of composing differences between the Indian Government and the Amir, and more importantly, persuading the Amir to accept the literal fulfilment of the Agreement of 1873 as insisted upon by the Russian Government.<sup>107</sup> This involved a delicate question of the withdrawal of the Afghans from *Roshan* and *Shignan*, which lay north of the Oxus. While, the acceptance of the Oxus as a frontier also meant the transfer of Darwaz, which was situated on the south of Oxus, from the possession of Bokhara to that of Afghanistan.<sup>108</sup> Durand, very shrewdly, mentioned the Russo-Afghan border skirmishes and apprised Abdurrahman Khan

<sup>102</sup>Staal to Chichkine, 31 May 1893.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup>Kapnist to Staal, 8 June 1893.

<sup>105</sup>Staal to Chichkine, 31 May 1893.

<sup>106</sup>Kapnist to Staal, 8 June 1893.

<sup>107</sup>Sykes, *Sir Mortimer Durand*, p. 210; Noyce, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

<sup>108</sup>*Vide* Appendix XXII (a): Concerning Russo-Afghan Boundary, 12 November 1893.

of the dangers involved in his desire to retain the controversial territories. In this manner Durand was able to obtain the Amir's acceptance to withdrawal.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, persuading the Amir to retain Wakhan was no less delicate. The Amir considered Wakhan to be indefensible from the military point of view. While deciding to accept Wakhan, the Amir was in fact rendering an important service to the British who wanted to keep their possessions separated from those of Russia.<sup>110</sup>

The final agreement had to be delayed till 1895, when Gladstone had retired and Rosebery had taken over as Prime Minister, leaving his place at the Foreign Office for the Earl of Kimberley;<sup>111</sup> and Lord Elgin succeeded Lansdowne as Viceroy. The agreement was reached by the exchange of notes between Kimberley and Staal on March 11, 1895 by which the sphere of influence of Great Britain and Russia to the east of Lake Victoria (Zor Kul), were to be divided by a line starting from a point on that lake near its eastern extremity. The line was to be marked out and its precise configuration settled by a Joint Commission of a purely technical character. The British Government was to arrange as to the manner with which the Amir of Afghansistan was to be represented on the commission.

By the agreement, the British and the Russian Governments engaged to abstain from exercising any political influence or control, in the north and the south of the Oxus—the demarcation line, respectively.<sup>112</sup> Another important point in the agreement was that it prevented Great Britain from annexing Wakhan, or exercising any influence over it so that the possessions of Britain and Russia should remain separate from physical contact with each other.<sup>113</sup>

The implementation of the agreement was made conditional upon the Amir of Afghanistan withdrawing from the control of *Roshan* and *Shignan* and the Amir of Bokhara

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<sup>109</sup>Abdurrahman, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 160-161.

<sup>110</sup>Sykes, *Durand*, p. 217.

<sup>111</sup>*Vide* Appendix XXIII : Kimberley to Staal, 11 March 1895.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*, clause 4.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, clause 5.

from Darwaz.<sup>114</sup> For putting into effect this essential part of the transaction, the British and the Russian Governments undertook to exercise their influence 'respectively with the two Amirs.'<sup>115</sup>

With the completion of these pre-requisites, the Joint Commission started its work, which was completed with considerable rapidity and without being disturbed by 'the changes and deviations of the political weather cock.'<sup>116</sup> Sir Thomas Holdich, writing picturesquely of the work of the Commission said that after having carried the demarcation upto physically approachable limits, the frontier was 'thence projected into space where ... no pillars or mark stones could be raised to witness it. Amidst the voiceless waste of a vast white wilderness 20,000 feet above the sea level, absolutely inaccessible to man and within the ken of no living creature but the Pamir eagles.'<sup>117</sup>

The Pamirs Agreement of 1895 marked the end of the Central Asian or Afghan question between Great Britain and Russia, and signified, after more than a century, a settled Afghan frontier in the north. With the insertion of Wakhan as an Afghan territory the British and the Russian frontiers were separated from each other, which in a sense meant the continuation of the 'idea of a buffer state' between the thrust of the two mighty imperialisms. This Agreement also seemed to serve a link in the chain of two important events : the eventful Anglo-Russian rapprochement of 1907, that smoothened the way for a unique colonial accommodation which the political pundits of the time could hardly foresee; and also it was yet another, and significant step towards the *entente cordiale* in Europe, whose importance in the annals of foreign relations is self-evident.

#### (vi) Revival of Forward Policy and the Durand Mission (1888-1895)

The unsettled state of the Indo-Afghan frontier inhabited by the turbulent tribes was posing yet another serious

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<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup>Holdich, *Indian Borderlands*, pp. 291-294.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*

question for the British Government. These tribes had much more in common with the Afghans than with the people of British India. Consequently, the loyalty of these tribes to the British Government was always in doubt. The British needed this tribal belt due to strategic reasons, as the important passes linking India with Afghanistan were situated there. But Abdurrahman was prepared to seize every opportunity to include this tribal belt into his own dominions. This the Amir admits in his autobiography:<sup>118</sup>

Seeing that every Government was trying to get hold of as much as it possibly could, I also tried to take as much share as possible in these provinces which formerly belonged to Afghanistan.

In July 1888, the Amir had requested the then Viceroy of India, the Marquis of Dufferin, to send a mission of British officials to Kabul to settle the boundary question along with other issues of importance. The underlying idea behind the Amir's move for the demarcation of the Indo-Afghan boundary seems to be to checkmate the British advance towards Afghanistan by drawing a boundary line which included the tribes within the Afghan territories. By the time, the mission under Sir Mortimer Durand was ready to leave India, the Amir fell ill and soon after became engaged with the revolt of Ishaq Khan in Afghan Turkestan.<sup>119</sup> Therefore, the mission had to be postponed on the request of the Amir. The postponement of the mission at such a time seems quite reasonable, since the Amir himself was not sure if his rule was going to last. It was also not safe for the British officials. Nevertheless, his sincerity was put to question,<sup>120</sup> as the postponement of the mission seemed a well-thought out decision.

The Amir had invited the mission when Lord Dufferin was in India, but soon after he was replaced by Lord Lansdowne in November 1888.<sup>121</sup> The new Viceroy, like Lord Lytton, set out to be quite firm from the very inception.

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<sup>118</sup>*Op. cit.*, II, p. 149.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>120</sup>Singhal, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>121</sup>Abdurrahman, *op. cit.*, II p. 134,

The Amir understandably desired some time to watch the policies of the new Viceroy before entering into direct negotiations with his representatives.

Once the Amir got the mission postponed on his initiative, it was very difficult for him to have his invitation accepted by Lord Lansdowne. The British 'forward policy' once again seemed to have been revived. From the date Lord Lansdowne succeeded to the Viceroyalty of India, a period of 'difficulties and misunderstandings' between Afghanistan and Great Britain re-started.<sup>122</sup> Till the frontiers were finally demarcated, the relations between the Amir and the Indian Government remained far from being amicable.

During Ishaq Khan's rebellion, Lansdowne intervened to protest against the cruelty with which the Amir was treating his enemies. The Amir considered it an undue interference in his internal affairs and bitterly resented it.<sup>123</sup> The Viceroy went to the extent of refusing the Amir's request for arms on the ground that he had not disclosed the military strength of his country. Abdurrahman presents a catalogue of grievances against him.<sup>124</sup>

Lord Lansdowne was not satisfied with creating unpleasant anxieties for me, but went further still, even so far as to stop the guns which I had bought with my own private—money in India, not allowing them to be brought to Kabul. More than that,...the frontier officials stopped the private goods of the Afghan merchants—iron, steel, copper, etc. on the excuse that such goods were required to make war materials, and so long as they were not certain about the friendship of Afghanistan, they said they could not allow such things to be imported into Afghanistan.

Although humiliated, the Amir did behave in a very composed manner. Had it been Amir Shere Ali, he might have fallen back on Russia. But Abdurrahman was a different sort of person—cool and calculating. Perhaps, he refrained from taking an untoward action because Shere Ali's example was still fresh in his memory.

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<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 136,



On the British side, 'forward policy' was being re-introduced, but the Amir very shrewdly avoided giving them any excuse for laying their hands upon him. Lord Roberts had taken over as Commander-in-Chief. He was a powerful exponent of the 'forward policy'. Roberts had also exercised great influence over Lord Lansdowne. It was even feared by the British Cabinet at London that Roberts by his policy and influence might involve his government into difficulties in the north-west frontier and with the Amir of Afghanistan. There was even a suggestion to call back Roberts from India.<sup>125</sup>

Meanwhile the Amir, discontented by the attitude and policies of the British Indian Government, had also tried to open direct communications with London. The Amir had a feeling that as Afghanistan had no representative or any other means at its disposal to apprise the London Government of the Afghan side of the question, the decision of the British Cabinet were loaded in favour of the Indian Government as they were generally taken on the advice of the Viceroy. And consequently, the Viceroy had a freer hand in dealing with Afghanistan. The Amir was convinced of the fact that if the Viceroy chose to make war on Afghanistan he could easily do so. Abdurrahman, being the head of a weak Kingdom, was very sensitive about the questions which involved in any way the curtailment of his independence and freedom of action. He resisted every move on the part of the Indian Government which tended to restrict his actions.<sup>126</sup>

It was not pleasant to me to think that the Government of Afghanistan was to a certain extent under any Viceroy of India...and that *I, the Amir of Afghanistan*, should be merely a tool and a puppet to be made to dance by a Viceroy. I am still anxious to relieve Afghanistan from this everlasting danger, because it is an independent Kingdom.

Lord Lansdowne on his part was confident that he was the representative of a powerful Kingdom, and that the

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<sup>125</sup>Kimberley to Campbell-Bannermann, 7 October 1892, text in Philips, *op. cit.*, pp. 462-63.

<sup>126</sup>Abdurrahman, II, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

Amir was indebted to the British Government for various assistance given to his country from the time of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan. The Viceroy felt that for all this the Amir should be grateful to his government and express it by acceding to the wishes of the Indian Government.

In his zeal to assert independence, the Amir interpreted that all such assistance to his country was given ultimately in the larger interest of the defence and security of the British Indian Empire. Abdurrahman thought that it was in the interest of the British Government to make and keep Afghanistan as a barrier against Russian march towards the Indian frontier.<sup>127</sup> Had it not been in the interest of India herself, it was thought, the British Government would not have continuously paid subsidy to Afghanistan and rendered it other assistance from time to time.

Nevertheless, the Amir succeeded in averting the immediate danger of war with India by sending the letter directly to Lord Salisbury. But his wish of establishing direct communication with the London Government on a permanent basis was set aside by the British Government. This step of bypassing the Indian Government, even more annoyed the Viceroy, and naturally so.

In attempts to consolidate his dominion, Abdurrahman brought under his control many such territories on the Indo-Afghan frontier which further heightened the existing ill-feeling between the Amir and the Viceroy. In December 1891, the Commander-in-Chief of the Amir, Ghulam Haider Khan occupied Asmar, whose Khan, Timur Mirza Shah had already given the oath of allegiance to Abdurrahman in 1887.<sup>128</sup> This caused great indignation to the British Indian Government. They insisted the area be vacated by the Afghans, but the Amir refused to yield. Thus, at this point of time, the entire area lying between India and Afghanistan was in an unsettled state: the British and the Afghans took their turn in occupying certain areas on the frontier and protesting against each

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<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 158.

other's occupation. The Amir, as a weaker party, had to accede to the demands of the British Government because he did not want a direct armed confrontation with the powerful British. He would have found himself in a miserable state of affairs between the two iron hands—those of Russia and Britain. Since the friendship with Russia had already become a distant dream, it was neither wise nor advisable for the Amir to risk the displeasure of the British Viceroy beyond a certain limit.

While the relations between the Amir and the Viceroy were already deteriorating due to the claims and counter-claims over the tribal belt, the Indian Government was developing not only fortifications along the line but also constructing railway communications by making a tunnel in Khojak hills and taking the railway line up to New Chaman. This was not all. News reached Amir Abdurrahman Khan, who was busy erecting fortifications in Herat, that the British railway was to be extended upto Seistan via Kandahar! The Amir immediately left for Kabul to take stock of the situation.

The British forces were also gradually but steadily occupying large chunks of the territory of the tribal belt, particularly Bajour, Chitral, Swat and New Chaman. They were annoyed when the Amir refused to abandon the territories occupied by him.

Whatever the Amir might have thought about the British 'forward policy', the Indian measures to counter the advance of the Amir and the firm attitude of the Viceroy compelled Abdurrahman to approach the Government of India with a view to defining the boundary between the two countries before any further advance from either side.<sup>129</sup> Lansdowne, however did not accept the Amir's suggestion for sending British officers to Kabul for the purpose of discussing the outstanding points of misunderstanding between the two countries. Actually, the Viceroy was willing to receive the Amir himself in India, or to send a high power official to convey to the Amir what he precisely

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<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 149 *et. seq.*

wanted. The Amir, on his part, was insisting upon receiving a mission empowered to discuss and decide the boundary questions.<sup>130</sup>

By 1892, thrice the Amir had extended his invitation to a British mission, and thrice Lord Lansdowne had refused to accept it. But soon after, when the situation was very tense on the border, Lansdowne finally realised the need of a meeting. He consequently informed the Amir to receive a mission under Lord Roberts at Kabul. Abdurrahman did not like Roberts to come to Kabul because of his tributary experience during the War of 1878-1880, for which he was not liked in Afghanistan and also because he was an enthusiastic exponent of the 'Forward School' of frontier policy.

The Amir's hesitancy and delay in accepting the mission, brought a very firm communication from the Viceroy, which was clearly in the form of an ultimatum.<sup>131</sup> The letter contained a list of those actions of the Amir which had made the Indian authorities uneasy and restless. The Amir was asked to receive General Roberts, the Commander-in-Chief, at Jalalabad not later than October 1892. The Viceroy also wanted the reply of his July 23 letter by September 1. He showed his impatience of the Amir's indefinite promises and uncertain dates for receiving the mission. Roberts was to be accompanied by over ten thousand (10,000) soldiers.

Abdurrahman immediately apprehended that some serious crisis was brewing. He wanted to avoid the mission headed by Roberts in any case. But he was chagrined at the thought of ten thousand British soldiers inside Afghanistan. If the Viceroy really wanted to resolve the political questions between the two powers, then why General Roberts and ten thousand soldiers? What was actually required, as the Amir rightly thought, was not a soldier but a statesman, as a militarist like Roberts was expected to aggravate the situation rather than resolve it. To effectively deal with the situation, the Amir did two things: he

<sup>130</sup>Referred to in Singhal, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>131</sup>Abdurrahman, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 156-157; see also Singhal, *op. cit.*, p. 141 et. seq.

despatched a letter directly to the British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury; and for the Indian Government he immediately posted a letter informing the Viceroy that his emissary Mr Salter Pyne, an Englishman then in the service of the Amir, was coming to make necessary arrangements about the proposed mission.<sup>132</sup>

While dealing with the Hazara rebellion the Amir was thinking as to how friendly his British friends were behaving with him by stopping all aid and goods purchased by him from being sent to Afghanistan, and by threatening to send ten thousand British soldiers under General Roberts who was intensely disliked by the Afghans and hence unwelcome in their territory.<sup>133</sup>

Mr Pyne, who had two letters from the Amir, one for the Viceroy and the other addressed to Sir Mortimer Durand, was instructed to get the mission postponed, as Roberts was retiring soon as Commander-in-Chief and leaving for England. Pyne succeeded in assuring the Viceroy of the inability of the Amir to receive the mission due to the continuing civil war in Afghanistan and got the mission postponed. Another event which also contributed to the postponement of the mission was the change of Government in England. Lord Kimberley, the Liberal Secretary of State for India in the new Gladstone Ministry, dissuaded the Viceroy from pressing on the reception of the mission forthwith if the Amir desired postponement. Lansdowne was cautioned by Kimberley that the demarcation of the Indo-Afghan border could not be effected without the willingness of the Amir.<sup>134</sup>

Actually, the Liberal Government was averse to the forward policy pursued by Lansdowne and Roberts. Kimberley got Roberts removed from that pivotal position as the Commander-in-Chief from where he got even Lansdowne with him in pursuing and implementing the policy.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>Abdurrahman, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup>Singhal, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>135</sup>See Philips, *op. cit.*, pp.462-63.



Lansdowne's term as Viceroy also expired in January 1894.

Thus, Abdurrahman came out successful in his diplomacy, and Pyne was able to pave the way for the historic Mission of Sir Mortimer Durand in 1893.

The negotiations started on the return of Salter Pyne, who brought with him a map given to him by Sir Mortimer Durand showing the countries of Wazirī, New Chaman, including the railway station, Chageh, Bulund Khel, the whole of Mohmand, Asmar and Chitral, and other territories lying in between, as belonging to India. In reply, Abdurrahman wrote a lengthy letter to the Viceroy predicting the unreliable behaviour of the tribes and warning the British Government that if the tribes<sup>136</sup>

were included in my dominions, I shall be able to make them fight against the enemy of England and myself...I will gradually make them good friends of Great Britain. But if you cut them out of my dominions, they will neither be of any use to you nor to me: you will always be engaged in fighting and troubles with them, and they will always go on plundering...In your cutting away from me these frontier tribes who are people of my nationality and religion, you... will make me weak, and my weakness is injurious for your Government.

How correct was Abdurrahman proved if the later experience of the British with the tribes could be cited as an example.

Moreover, Abdurrahman was a shrewd bargainer; he would always remind the British that by helping Afghanistan, they would be making it strong, and that would only be in the interest of the security of India. In this way, the Amir used to try to get concessions from the British Government.

Lord Lansdowne was not a man to be swayed by the protestations of the Amir, or heed to his request on the question of the tribes. The Afghan officials were squeezed out by threat of force from the disputed areas of the tribal belt on the orders of the Viceroy, and British agents became

<sup>136</sup> Abdurrahman, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 157-158 .

active throughout the length and breadth of what is known as the North-West Frontier. But in spite of the British insistence, the Amir did not vacate Asmar because of its strategic importance to Afghanistan, lying as it did on a central position in the province of Jalalabad, and controlling the roads to Chitral and the Pamirs. The Amir considered Asmar as a place equal in importance to Herat and Kandahar for the Kingdom of Afghanistan.<sup>137</sup>

However, it were not only the British who were trying to gain out of the unsettled state of Indo-Afghan border. The Amir was equally trying to push his border towards India and annexing as much as he possibly could without physically colliding with the British.

Salter Pyne was finally able to prevail upon the Amir to accept the settlement of the Indo-Afghan frontier, and Lansdowne appointed Sir Mortimer Durand to do the job.<sup>138</sup> Since no military guards were attached to the mission which contained only some officials and experts, the Amir took all the precautions for its safe arrival, stay and departure from his territories.

By the agreement of November 12, 1893, which was arrived at largely due to the tact, patience and sincerity of Sir Mortimer Durand, the Amir was allowed to retain Wakhan,<sup>139</sup> Asmar and the valley above it, Kafiristan, Mohmand and a portion of Waziristan. On the other hand the Amir undertook not to interfere in Swat, Bajaur, and relinquished his claim over the rest of the territories under the British occupation including Dawar, Kurrum valley, Chageh and New Chaman.<sup>140</sup> The tribal areas around Gomal pass, inhabited by Ghilazai and Lohani tribes, were also given over to the British.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>138</sup>Text in Philips, *op. cit.*, pp. 463-64.

<sup>139</sup>See the settlement in regard to Pamirs.

<sup>140</sup>Philips, pp. 463-64.

<sup>141</sup>Tikekar, S.R., 'The Durand Line', *India Quarterly*, October-December, 1950.

The amenability of the Amir to sign the agreement and renounce his title to some of the territories, was amply rewarded by the British. The Amir's subsidy was increased from twelve lakhs to eighteen lakhs. The Government of India not only undertook to raise no objections to the Amir's purchase and import of arms and ammunitions of war, but also to help and facilitate the task.<sup>142</sup>

The story of the Indo-Afghan boundaries, however, did not end there. The actual demarcation, which was taken up by four joint commissions, did not prove an easy job. Before the commissioners could complete their work, Durand was transferred to Persia. Had he been present on the spot, many of the difficulties might have been solved by his presence.

The progress of demarcation was marked by interruptions and compromises. Partly, it was due to the fact that the Afghan commissioners were given different maps than were sent by the Viceroy to the Amir.

When there were conflicting versions of maps, the two sides referred the matter to their respective governments. Thereupon, the Amir and the Viceroy would enter into communications with each other. Sometimes the delay in exchanges and settling differences bogged down the negotiations to such an extent that the prospects of settlement seemed far from bright. But willingness to settle the ticklish boundary issue was present on both the sides: sometimes the Amir yielded to the Viceroy's threat, while at others, the Viceroy had to accommodate the Amir's view point by making concessions<sup>143</sup>

The demarcation of the Indo-Afghan frontier, known as Durand Line ostensibly seemed to be a remarkable feat. In fact, it was hardly so. The warring and turbulent tribes were divided into two countries without any ethnic or other consideration. With Afghanistan, they did not pose much of a problem as Abdurrahman had so accurately foreseen. While the British separated them from the rest of their

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<sup>142</sup>Philips, pp. 463-64.

<sup>143</sup>Singhal, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-153.

Indian administration, and created an agency for their control, known as the North-West Frontier Agency. During the rest of their rule in India, the British were kept engaged in wars with these tribes who used to cross the frontier into Afghanistan, as and when it suited them. Moreover, both Abdurrahman and his son Habibullah maintained their contacts and influence with these tribes of the British sphere, across the Durand Line.

It seems that the Amir's consent was bought by raising the subsidy. While the British problem was further aggravated as action against the tribes constantly involved the danger of war with Afghanistan, whose rulers maintained close liaison with these tribes, perhaps as a measure of defence against possible British aggression.

The headstrong and independent minded tribes were not consulted when their fate was divided and hence they never in fact submitted to the British rule. In any way, the demarcation of the Indo-Afghan frontier did not solve the British problem, while Afghanistan got a measure of respite from the British interference, for whom the tribes posed quite a problem.

Such was the price the British had accepted to continuously pay for controlling the strategic valleys and passes on the north-west.

Afghanistan's boundary dispute with Persia over Seistan may also be briefly mentioned here. As has been explained earlier, a boundary commission under Goldsmid had tried to settle the question, but its award was not fully acceptable either to Persia or Afghanistan. Amir Shere Ali's dissatisfaction over the matter was one of the causes which led to the Second Afghan War (1878-80). During the reign of Abdurrahman, the question was reopened in 1888. Maj-General C.S. Macleane, British Consul in Meshed, as the arbitrator, together with the Afghan and the Persian commissioners, tried to settle the question (1891). Between the two antagonistic parties, the work of the commission could only proceed slowly and with interruptions. The final award was, however, not acceptable to the Persians.

This led to a third arbitration by Sir Henry McMahon which gave its award in November 1904. Agreed maps were prepared and the boundaries between the two countries were laid down by erecting pillars. The award also included a settlement pertaining to Helmund waters and about the construction of canals. Despite the three awards, the parties remained dissatisfied. The question was revived in 1935, 1939, 1947 and then in 1955. It is still at issue even today.\*

What exercised the minds of the British rulers about the Perso-Afghan dispute was the fear that either of the parties might lean towards Russia in trying to get this dispute settled in its favour. This, however, did not happen. Both the Persians and the Afghans continued to seek the good offices of the British Government. The endeavours of the British Government were directed to find an objective solution of the dispute acceptable to both the countries.

#### (vii) Consequences of Forward Policy (1895-1900)

The 'forward policy' suffered only a temporary setback in the Second Afghan War; it was revived by 1884, and followed by three successive Viceroys—Dufferin, Lansdowne and Elgin. The policy was continued, with certain changes in its idiom and style, under the dynamic administration of Lord Curzon (1899-1905). The railways were extended up to the strategic points on the border. Active interest was taken by the British Government in the settlement of Afghan borders with Russia, Persia and India. Steps were also taken to control the tribal belt. Sir Robert Sandeman and Lord Roberts played an important part in the formulation and execution of the policy. Roberts maintained that the policy 'must be continued until our influence is felt up to the boundary of our ally, the ruler of Afghanistan.'<sup>144</sup>

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\*This account is based on notes of Professor Fazl-i-Rabbi Puzhwak of the University of Kabul. Afghanistan's relations with Iran is the subject matter of a Ph. D. thesis at the Aligarh Muslim University.

<sup>144</sup>Dharm Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 34.



The underlying object of the British policy had been to avoid a direct confrontation with the Russians on the borders of India. After a century of experience, the Indian rulers had realized how hazardous and expensive it was to directly control Afghanistan. They not only allowed it to maintain an independent existence, but continuously declared their aim to see it both independent and strong. But actually, the British never genuinely tried to make Afghanistan strong enough, nor allowed it to become totally independent of them. The existence of Afghanistan as a political entity, therefore, owed more to the continued rivalry between Britain and Russia, rather than their mutual or separate desire in its maintenance.

Although British interest in Afghanistan was largely security oriented, yet they took no concrete steps for strengthening it, so as to make it capable of withstanding any foreign aggression on its own. Rather, their object had been to keep Afghanistan dependent on them, which it took them about a century and two wars to endeavour to accomplish. Perhaps, Afghanistan was not helped to become strong because the Indian rulers feared that the Afghan guns might be turned against them. And it was to provide against this contingency that the British tried to keep Afghanistan weak, only to be aided enough to check Russian expansion. They even waged wars on Afghanistan to prevent its falling under the Russian sphere of influence.

Consequently, the Amir of Afghanistan was never treated by the British Government as an independent monarch. When Abdurrahman tried to establish his independent identity by attempting to have direct communication with the British Government at London, he was not accorded the privilege of an exchange of embassies. He was told to have relations only with and through the Viceroy of India, who, they said, was posted in closer proximity with Afghanistan and was, therefore, in a more advantageous position to study and deal with local situations. Lord Salisbury, the British Premier, in a letter to Abdurrahman, pointed out that the presence of British officials in Afghanistan had twice previously ended up tragically, and, therefore, it

would not be possible to receive an Afghan envoy in London until a British official could live with safety at Kabul. In fact, the security of British agents could not have been guaranteed by the Amir. Even the Muslim agents were kept as prisoners within the confines of Kabul. In his autobiography, Abdurrahman counters this by asserting that an Afghan agent in London would have paved the way for a better relationship and understanding between the two countries. The reason why the British agent was looked upon by the Afghans with suspicion was that its presence was considered a symbol of British superiority over the Afghans. Therefore, the Amir envisaged an exchange of embassies with the London Government to put Anglo-Afghan relations on a footing of equality and reciprocity. Such an exchange of embassies would have raised the prestige of the Amir among his people, and might also have resulted in the acceptance of a British agent in a more friendly and congenial atmosphere at Kabul.<sup>145</sup> Abdurrahman had claimed equality with Persia, which had for long enjoyed direct ambassadorial relations with Great Britain. However, the British Government could not countenance the Afghan ruler acting independently. This was evident from the Amir's wish to contract a triple alliance with Persia and Turkey, but, at the same time, the expression of his inability to do so because of the treaty stipulations with the British Government which forbade him from having any foreign relations without the knowledge and advice of the Viceroy of India.<sup>146</sup> Thus, the Amir, in his attempts to show that he could act as an independent sovereign ruler, was always checked by the protagonists of the 'forward policy,' who threatened him that the subsidy could be stopped, or by other coercive methods made the Amir realize his real position.

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<sup>145</sup>These negotiations started when S. Nasrullah Khan (second son of Abdurrahman) visited London in 1895; for Salisbury's letter see Frank Martin, *Under the Absolute Amir*, pp. 301-302; and for Amir's opinion, his *Autobiography*, II, pp. 254-258.

<sup>146</sup>Abdurrahman, *op. cit.*, II, p. 266.

Abdurrahman might have felt miserably helpless over the restrictions on his independence, but he was equally aware of the fact that Afghanistan was not strong enough to stand alone, and was bound, for its own safety, to lean upon one of its two powerful neighbours.<sup>147</sup> The Amir also, by his experience and mature judgment, knew well that his salvation lay in making a common cause with the British against the Russians, while the British wanted to provide security to their Indian Empire against the possibility of Russian threat by keeping Afghanistan as a semi-independent buffer state. The British could have arranged with the Russians to divide Afghanistan, but this course was considered inimical to the security of their empire, as it would have brought the Russians on the very threshold of India. Control over Afghanistan's foreign relations and defence sufficed to meet British needs; while Afghanistan had to be content with the restricted secondary role.

However, Abdurrahman, who was the strongest and perhaps the ablest of the Amirs, did not cease from asserting his independence altogether. He gave a slightly different interpretation to his engagements with the British Government, particularly those contracted in 1880 with Sir Lepel Griffin. After being checked from having any foreign relations, the Amir adopted a policy of isolationism in a manner to exclude even the possibility of British interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. He resisted, and to an extent successfully, the British forward push into the tribal belt during the Durand negotiations and on the spot demarcations of the Indo-Afghan boundary. Despite the resentment and protests of the British Government, the Amir did not demur from spreading his influence over the tribal people inhabiting the Indian side of the Durand Line, while the inclusion of the tribes within the Indian frontier proved to be a great liability for the British Administration. Before the turn of the century, the British Government had to cope with several tribal uprisings, of Mohamands, Waziris, and Afridis, and tackle the strategic Chitral question. On certain

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<sup>147</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 279.

occasions practically the whole of the frontier was ablaze. In spite of the understanding that the Amir would not interfere with the tribes, his complicity in the uprisings was suspect.

When Lord Elgin took over from Lansdowne as Viceroy in January 1894, the Indian Government was occupied with the Chitral question. Elgin's experience of the involvement changed his inclination<sup>148</sup> from following 'the doctrine of the Lawrence school', and led him to rethink the frontier policy afresh.

With all the expensive British commitments on the frontier and in Afghanistan, Elgin could not see any other reason for the British policy but to resist Russia and not to allow that power to interfere in Afghanistan.<sup>149</sup> He, therefore, pleaded to Lord Rosebery, the British Premier, to guarantee Afghanistan's northern frontier, which Abdurrahman was asking for, as this seemed to Elgin the logical culminating point of the whole British policy.<sup>150</sup> The Viceroy, while regretting Lord Lawrence's suggestion of 'the frontier on the Indus', argued in favour of a forward policy and for preparedness to resist Russia on the Hindu Kush. He was in favour of effective British control of the tribal belt and the strengthening of the defences on the Pamirs by fortifying Chitral and Kashmir.<sup>151</sup> In effect, he advocated as well as pursued a policy which was both 'forward and 'spirited'. The suppression of the uprising of the frontier tribes, in the wake of the Indo-Afghan frontier demarcations in 1897-98, and Lord Elgin's 'effective' policy did not make the Amir any more cordial towards the British Government; rather, it hardened his attitude.

Lord Elgin's assessment and thinking on the frontier question was largely a reaction to his experience with the turbulence of the tribes. The method he adopted to deal with the problem came to be known as the 'Close Border' system. It involved a policy of non-intervention tempered

<sup>148</sup>Elgin to Rosebery, 7 July 1895, *vide* Philips, *op. cit.*, pp. 464-66.

<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup>*Ibid.*

by punitive expeditions.<sup>152</sup> It led to the construction of fortifications all along the border and the retention of garrisons. The Government of India also showed reluctance in supplying arms and ammunition to the Amir because these arms tended to make their appearance in the hands of the tribal insurgents. Although grants in money were lavishly provided to the Afghans, yet the British Government maintained a strict control over the purchase of arms by the Amir.

The severity of the punitive expeditions, however, created an alarm in London. The forward policy was subjected to a heavier criticism than anticipated from a Conservative Government. On October 13, 1897, Lord Hamilton, Secretary of State for India in the Salisbury Government, despatched a stern note to Elgin:<sup>153</sup>

No new responsibility should be taken unless absolutely required by actual strategical necessities and the protection of the British Indian border.

In another note of January 28, 1898, Hamilton asked the Viceroy to abandon the bellicose forward policy.<sup>154</sup> But Elgin could not be dissuaded from his determined course: under the pretence of acting in accordance with the absolute requirements of strategic necessities, he virtually ignored the instructions.

Elgin's policy left the Indo-Afghan relations in a state which was far from amicable when Lord Curzon took over as the Viceroy of India in January 1899.

Amir Abdurrahman was much disturbed by the Russian railway advance which had linked Orenburg and Tashkent to a place called Kushk, on the very border of Afghanistan.<sup>155</sup> The British were also uneasy; they considered the railways patently strategic, as the Russo-Afghan trade was insignificant to warrant such a chain of communications.<sup>156</sup> The Amir, in response, wanted to construct an

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<sup>152</sup>Dharm Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>153</sup>Cited in *ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>154</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup>Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia*, p. 264. et seq.

<sup>156</sup>Gooch, *Modern Europe*, p. 373.



elaborate system of fortifications along his northern borders and asked for British aid in money and arms. He reiterated his old argument that the defence of Afghanistan's northern borders was in fact the security interest of India which the British Government should help in providing for. By the same logic, the Amir protested against the British fortifications on the Indo-Afghan frontier, implying that the only frontier which the Afghan and the British should jointly defend was the northern border of Afghanistan.<sup>157</sup>

Curzon's response was negative. He accused the Amir for not introducing modern means of communications, such as telegraph and roads, which would have increased the mobility of Afghan troops and facilitated consultations with the Government of India.<sup>158</sup> The Amir's refusal was based on the plea that the induction of modern technology would have involved the presence of foreigners in his country whom the Amir could not have protected against the machinations of his sirdars, who were intensely anti-British and whose behaviour was unpredictable and uncontrollable in this respect.<sup>159</sup>

Abdurrahman had remained dissatisfied with Lansdowne and Elgin and pinned hopes of a fairer deal from Curzon, when the latter took charge of India. Although, Lord Curzon was pursuing a sort of compromise between the 'occupation' and the 'close border' policies, yet his patronizing behaviour left Abdurrahman increasingly disgruntled.<sup>160</sup> The Indo-Afghan differences can also be ascribed to the conflict of personalities: Curzon, who was called the 'last of the great proconsuls', possessed overwhelming egotism and was a proponent of the 'white man's burden' school.<sup>161</sup> Like many of his class, he believed in the superiority of the white race, and its destiny of

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<sup>157</sup>Adamec, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>158</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>159</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>160</sup>Dharm Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>161</sup>Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

'civilizing mission'. Abdurrahman, on the other hand, was the ablest and the strongest of the Amirs of Afghanistan, who strove hard to lay secure foundations for making Afghanistan a sovereign independent state. The style and ambition of the two were poles apart and contradictory. However, Abdurrahman could not live long to deal with Curzon.

For the Afghans, however, Curzon's viceroyalty had certain redeeming features. The North-West Frontier was reorganized, being divided into zones: one directly under British administration, and the other a 'free tribal zone' lying between the first zone and the Durand Line. The tribes were left free and were subsidized for keeping peace on the frontier.<sup>162</sup> This left ample room for the Amir to exercise his type of influence across the border.

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<sup>162</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 169.

# 10

## End Of An Epoch 1901-1907

Turkestan, Afghanistan, Transcaspia, Persia,...they are the pieces of a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for the dominion of the world... The future of Great Britain...will be decided not in Europe...but in the continent whence our emigrant stock first came, and to which as conquerors their descendants have returned.\*

Afghanistan is the door of India, and the safety of India depends on keeping that door strong and shut.\*\*

By the turn of the century, several things happened which influenced the course of Indo-Afghan relations. Abdurrahman died in October 1901, and was succeeded by his eldest son, Habibullah. The Russians, finding Britain involved in the Boer War in South Africa, started pressing for the revival of the Central Asian question. They sought direct trade relations with Afghanistan, thus challenging the exclusive British control over Afghan affairs.

Habibullah's peaceful accession to the throne was an unprecedented event in Afghanistan. Its credit, however, must go to Abdurrahman, who foresightedly sought to avoid the mistakes of his predecessors.<sup>1</sup> He did not name his

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\*Curzon, *Persia And The Persian Question*, I, p. 4.

\*\*H.M. Habibullah Khan of Afghanistan.

<sup>1</sup>See an interesting discussion by Abdurrahman himself, in his *Autobiography*, II, Chap. i., pp. 1-13,

successor in so many words, nor appointed his sons as governors of different provinces. He mitigated the possibility of rivalry among his sons by keeping all of them at Kabul under his own care and observation, and by putting them to work under the supervision of Habibullah Khan, who was entrusted with the responsibilities of administration. Thus, when Abdurrahman was dead and gone, the experienced and well-entrenched Habibullah did not have much problem in governing the country.

Habibullah, immediately after his father's death, had hardly time and inclination to pause and think on his own before the British and the Russians once again started taking active interest in Afghanistan. The moves of the two powers were afoot even in the last years of Abdurrahman.

The Russians, during their chequered but steady advance in Central Asia, were always inclined to seize any opportunity which was likely to give them a chance of meddling directly in the Afghan affairs, notwithstanding their promises (to the British) to the contrary.

In 1900, when the British Government was preoccupied with the Boer War in South Africa, the Russians tried to enter into direct trade relations with Afghanistan, by reviving the so called 'Central Asian Question.'<sup>2</sup> At this point of time, Amir Abdurrahman was also not pleased with Lord Curzon. The Viceroy had not been polite and considerate to the Amir, who, in turn, was not only dissatisfied with some of the aspects of the Durand Line Settlement, but was annoyed by the erection of the fortifications on the Indian side of the Afghan frontier.<sup>3</sup>

The Russian Memorandum of February 6, 1900,<sup>4</sup> which was communicated to the British Premier, Lord Salisbury, raised certain specific issues which tended to reopen the Afghan question. The Memorandum after reiterating the Russian pledge (1873) of considering Afghanistan

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<sup>2</sup>British Documents on the Origin of War, IV, p. 512.

<sup>3</sup>Abdurrahman, *op. cit.*, II, p. 139.

<sup>4</sup>Br, Docs., I, pp. 241-250. p. 306,

as outside their 'sphere of action' in political matters, informed the British Cabinet of the Russian intention to have direct non-political relations with Afghanistan. The non-political matters included the regulation of commercial relations and the settlement with the Afghans of such matters as might arise between the two neighbouring countries. With regard to trade, the Memorandum asserted the need of such relationship because of the extended means of communications (trans-Caspian railway up to Kushak) and the need for developing commerce between the two countries.

Lord Salisbury referred the Memorandum to the Government of India for comment and advice, and abstained from discussing its content before receiving the opinion of the Viceroy.<sup>5</sup> Lord Curzon was satisfied with the Russian re-statement that Afghanistan lay outside the pale of their influence; at the same time, he earnestly deprecated any alteration in the *status quo*.<sup>6</sup> He objected to the Russian contention that the re-establishment of direct relations between Russia and Afghanistan was indispensable for the settlement of frontier matters,<sup>7</sup> and strongly protested against the Russians directly dealing with Afghanistan for settling matters without any reference to the British Government.<sup>8</sup> The British knew too well their own axiom of *commerce as the basis of all politics*, and could unmistakably fathom the intention of the Russian Government to establish political relations with Afghanistan under the garb of commerce and matters of local detail. Moreover, trade and frontier relations were deemed impossible without the stationing of Russian agents in Afghanistan—that being essentially a political matter which the British Government could not countenance 'as custodians of the peace and security of India.'<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 311.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, IV, p. 512.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, I, pp. 310-311; also *Ibid.*, IV, p. 516.



To the Russians, the February 9 Memorandum was not a request to the British Cabinet, but an intimation of the Russian Government's decision to enter into direct relations with Afghanistan 'in consequence of altered circumstances.'<sup>10</sup> In taking follow-up action on their government's decision, therefore, the Russians did not wait for the British reply or reaction. On the instance of the Governor-General of Russian Turkestan, the Russian political agent at Bokhara, V. Ignatieff contacted an Afghan trading agent in February 1900.<sup>11</sup> A letter was sent to Amir Abdurrahman, as a first step towards the establishment of direct friendly relations between Russia and Afghanistan, assuring the Amir of the Russian Government's friendship and good neighbourliness. This letter was forwarded by the Amir to the Government of India, with a note characterizing the Russian communication as highly improper and showing alarm at their movements.<sup>12</sup>

The British Government questioned their Russian counterpart about attempts to enter into direct relations with Afghanistan, mentioning Ignatieff's letter and Russian military movements on the Afghan border. The British, however, admitted that there was a case for direct Russian relations with Afghanistan for commercial and boundary dispute reasons, but declared that it could be sanctioned only by the Government at London,<sup>13</sup> and warned the Russians not to enter into direct correspondence with the Amir of Afghanistan.<sup>14</sup> Finally, Lord Salisbury declared that the moment was not propitious for further negotiations on the matter.<sup>15</sup>

#### (i) Curzon and Habibullah (1901-1905)

A new chapter had opened in Afghanistan's relations with India when Habibullah succeeded his father

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<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, I, pp. 306, 308, and also p. 312 for *Novoe Vremya*, 19 December 1902.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, IV, p. 513; *Ibid.*, I, p. 309.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 311.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 312.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, IV, p. 513.

Abdurrahman as the Amir, in October 1901. As Abdurrahman's relations with Curzon were far from amicable, Habibullah wanted to seize the opportunity provided by Russia's continuing pressure for opening up Afghanistan for trade and commerce, to resist Lord Curzon's moves for the revision of the Anglo-Afghan engagements, and, thereby assert independence from British control.

As a matter of fact, all the three parties concerned with the Afghan question were desiring a change in the nature of their respective relations. The Russians had already initiated for change in their moves for opening up Afghanistan. Habibullah Khan, the new Amir of Afghanistan, in informing Lord Curzon that he would behave in the same manner as his father did, had perhaps implied that he would continue to assert his independence of British control, at least, to the extent, Abdurrahman was doing in his later years. The British, conscious of the consequences of independence of Afghanistan in foreign relations, coupled with the Russian intention to have direct relations with Afghanistan, tried to revise the Anglo-Afghan engagements on the plea that the treaties with Abdurrahman were personal in character. But, the British Government, in intimating the Russian Government that both British policy and relations with Afghanistan remained unaffected by the accession of the new Amir,<sup>16</sup> purposely indulged in contradictory double-dealing. They wanted that Russia, in accordance with her previous undertakings, should continue to refrain from all relations with Afghanistan, and, at the same time, Amir Habibullah should be checked from becoming independent of British control. It can further be surmised that Habibullah's desire to gain more independence from the British control got impetus from Russian initiatives inasmuch as the British Indian Government was impelled by the Russian moves to have together control over Afghanistan. For the British, Habibullah's intractability to Curzon's overtures also seems to constitute a factor in their attitude.

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<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 520-521,

The British Government were planning to deal with the new Amir even before the death of Abdurrahman.<sup>17</sup> After a decade of experience of the Indo-Afghan frontier, the British were desiring certain rectifications in accordance with their strategic requirements. They wanted arrangements for obtaining information concerning the state of Afghan armaments and armed forces; Lord Curzon desired to control the supply of arms to the Amir, with some guarantee that they would not be used against India—the Amir giving an undertaking neither to supply arms nor lend any support to the tribes on the British side of the border. More importantly, the Indian Government wanted to station British officers near the Russo-Afghan border, in Herat and other places, ostensibly to plan joint Anglo-Afghan measures of defence against Russia, but actually it seems, to forestall the development of Russo-Afghan relations. For all this, Curzon envisaged a tighter British control over Afghan affairs.

Therefore, in October 1901, the Viceroy moved swiftly. As soon as he received Habibullah's letter informing that he had assumed, after his father's death, the charge as the sovereign of Afghanistan and that he would behave in the same manner as did his father. Curzon immediately wrote back that the engagements between Abdurrahman and the Indian Government were of a personal nature, and therefore had to be reconfirmed. He invited the Amir for discussion. Implied in this invitation was Curzon's idea for re-terminating the engagements. The Amir in his reply of October 31, 1901; reciprocated the Viceroy's desire for closer relations and promised to abide by the engagements contracted by his father so long as the British Government firmly adhered to them. Habibullah, however, did not see any need for either revision or renegotiation in the engagements.

In his letter of February 7, 1902, Lord Curzon urged upon Habibullah Khan the necessity of personal discussion

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<sup>17</sup>Particularly see Memorandum on Afghan succession, by Lord Curzon, 7 December 1898, N.A.I., Foreign Sec. F ; also, G/O India, Intelligence Branch, note of 22 July 1901.

in order to further strengthen the relations between the two countries. But the Amir, to the great disappointment of the Viceroy, refused to accept the invitation and considered the agreement of 1880 binding on both parties. The Amir further emphasized that there was 'not a single thing, either big or small, omitted from the terms of the agreement, or which would now be deserving of description or record.'<sup>18</sup> And, finally, therefore, he did not feel the need for any fresh agreement or negotiation.

Curzon's anxiety grew with the Amir's recalcitrance. There were rumours to the effect that Habibullah, installing the British, might be inclining towards the Russians. The Viceroy, therefore, tried a 'little coercion' in his letter of June 6, by being blunt and specific. The negotiations were considered necessary, he said, because Abdurrahman had misinterpreted the agreements to the disadvantage of the British Government, and Curzon desired to know Habibullah's interpretation. The Viceroy further held that the agreement of 1880 and the promise of 1883 concerning the payment of annual subsidy were personal, and demanded of the Amir a new treaty before paying him the subsidy and ensuring Afghanistan's safety against foreign aggression.<sup>19</sup>

This time, the Amir kept quiet and did not reply for six months. His long silence was indicative of his displeasure as well as his belief in the soundness of his stance. Curzon became growingly impatient. He considered the Amir ungrateful, and his attitude, both disloyal and unfriendly. As a result, the use of methods implied earlier was resorted to. The subsidy was withheld, the passage of arms and ammunition already purchased by the Amir was stopped and he was prevented from importing them any further until he acquiesced with the wishes of the Viceroy.

<sup>18</sup>N.A.I., For. Sec. F, No. 95, June 1902.

<sup>19</sup>Ripon's promise of 1883 contained the word *personally*, see Ripon to Abdurrahman, June 16. 1883, text in Adamec, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-175 (Appendix 4).

In this tense situation, the British Government at London intervened.<sup>20</sup> It was of the view that the Amir would probably become more friendly if promises of the subsidy and of British protection were given first and other questions were raised later. The Cabinet strongly objected to any action likely to entail military operations. Curzon had to bow before the wishes of the home Government, as in that period, friendship with Afghanistan had become an important factor in British Asian policy.<sup>21</sup>

To ease the situation, came the two letters of Habibullah Khan, of November 27 and December 9, 1902. Although, the Amir did not budge from his former position regarding the Anglo-Afghan engagements, rather he complained strongly against the unfriendly measures of the Viceroy, but also, he renewed his protestations of friendship with the British Government. The Amir, however, regretted the fact that the Viceroy did not choose to help him in settling his affairs first, while insisting on his leaving the country for a meeting that should take place, but at a mutually convenient time.

Lord Curzon was not wholly satisfied with the Amir's dilly-dallying; nevertheless, he decided to wait rather than to force the issue. Habibullah, in his letter of December 9, had accepted British Arbitration in the Perso-Afghan dispute over Seistan, and later allowed the mission led by Henry McMahon a passage through his territory to the Persian frontier.

Why was Habibullah so unwilling to accept Curzon's invitation for a visit to India? Initially, the Amir was hesitant because he had only recently acceded to the throne, and wanted to be sure before leaving his country that he was firmly established in his place. Habibullah also needed time to carefully think over the question of negotiability of the engagements raised by the Viceroy. But, subsequently, the Amir became annoyed by arrogant tone of the Viceroy's letters. His sense of self-respect and dignity was aroused, which

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<sup>20</sup>For the reasons see Hamilton to Curzon, 27 November and 19 December 1902, texts in Philips, *op. cit.*, pp.479-480.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, see also Gopal, *op. cit.*, p. 244.



helped him to prefer the loss of the subsidy rather than bow before a mere representative of another sovereign like him. Lord Curzon, known for his immense egotism and superiority consciousness, felt slighted by Habibullah's reticent response. That the two never met was perhaps for the betterment of Indo-Afghan relations.

It may also be noted here that certain implications of the contention that the British engagements with Abdurrahman were no longer binding and were required to be renegotiated with the new Amir. Habibullah contended that if the engagements did not become renewable after the death of Queen Victoria, how could they become so after the death of his own father. Furthermore, if the engagements were no longer valid, then Habibullah remained under no obligations not to establish relations with Russia! There was another difficult question for the British Indian Government: if all the previous agreements were no more tenable, then what about the Indo-Afghan frontier—the Durand Line! In short, by an apparently simple insistence on the negotiability of the engagements, the British Indian Government found itself in a none-too-enviable position. All that the endeavours of several generations of British rulers had sought to accomplish during the course of a century seemed to be in jeopardy!

The Russians, however, continued to persist for direct relations with Afghanistan. The assessment of the British Government was that there was little to be gained by further correspondence with their Russian counterparts on the question, and that it was useless to appeal to the understanding between Great Britain and Afghanistan which Count Lamsdorff, the Russian Foreign Minister, had expressly stated as not binding on Russia. It was also considered useless to insist on a definition of the term *non-politique* made in the Russian communication of February 6, 1900, because facts had proved that British view of its meaning was widely divergent from that of the Russian Government.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Br. Docs., I, No. 377, p. 308, C. Spring-Rice to Lansdowne, 12 October 1903.

For once, the British Government seemed reigned to acquiesce with the Russian Government's notification regarding their intention of despatching Russian agents into Afghanistan. But the British saw a way out from their intended acquiescence by contending that the stationing of agents in Afghanistan required the consent of the Amir,<sup>23</sup> and that the British, even though in charge of Afghan foreign relations, had refrained from sending their agents without the Amir's approval.

Amir Habibullah, although annoyed with Lord Curzon's dictatorial attitude, came to the rescue of the British Government when approached for his views concerning the Russian desire. In his letter of July 28, 1903, the Amir conveyed to the British Government the assurance that he would not himself confer with the Russian Government and protested against the actions of their officials.<sup>24</sup> However, the Amir's unwillingness in dealing directly with Russia was no act of favour to the British. Afghans had their own misgivings about the Russians.

Habibullah was, in fact, pleased with the British gesture of approaching him regarding the question of agents. The Russian Government, through its agents, had already approached the Amir for closer commercial relationship and for throwing open the trade routes of Afghanistan to Russian caravans. It was also pointed out that the British Government had already been approached on the subject and a favourable reply from the Amir would greatly strengthen the Russian case. The Amir, while acknowledging the receipt of the Russian letter (September 1902), had requested the Russian Government to communicate through the British Government in accordance with the precedent established by his father Amir Abdurrahman.

In face of Curzon's expansive forward policy—in Persia, Tibet, and Afghanistan, his plan of occupying Kandahar and his aggressive dealings with Habibullah

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<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, No. 309, p. 314.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

Khan—the Russian move for relations with Afghanistan swæəs innocent:<sup>25</sup>

Russian had abandoned direct relations spontaneously, ... She had done so under totally different conditions ... Her abstention at that time was natural, but could not be considered so any longer. *That two States should be immediate neighbours and yet without direct relations, was obviously inconceivable.*

The Russians had insisted only upon their right to have direct relations with Afghan officials on purely non-political questions. They promised that such relations would not imply diplomatic representation in Afghanistan nor any interference in Afghan affairs; they even promised to give guarantees for the observance of their undertakings.<sup>26</sup>

The British were in a dilemma. Allowing the Russians to have direct intercourse with Afghanistan meant the abnegation of their Afghan policy. At the same time, it seemed difficult to resist the Russian demand for direct dealings with Afghanistan about small local matters essentially non-political in nature.<sup>27</sup> This trend in British thinking was known to the Russian Government. The Indian Government under Lord Curzon was averse to giving any such concession to the Russians. But, as already mentioned, the Viceroy's rather undiplomatic handling of the Amir of Afghanistan and his belligerently imperialist stand on the Afghan issue was not quite acceptable to the British Cabinet. Curzon had been asked to act with caution and restraint.

The Russian Government saw the moment propitious for a positive move: the British Cabinet seemed half-inclined towards the Russian demand; there were differences between the British and the Indian Governments; and Amir Habibullah Khan was unhappy with the Viceroy. If the British Government were tending to accept the Russian contention in principle, Russia's Central Asian officials went on to present before them a concrete instance for

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, IV, No. 465, p. 516, Memorandum, 14 October 1903.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 185, Hardinge to Lansdowne, 22 November 1903.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 186, Lansdowne to Spring-Rice, 25 November 1903.

accepting it in practice. The boundary pillars on the Russo-Afghan frontier had been destroyed. The Russian Government claimed that the question of re-installation of those pillars had rendered the direct relations between the two limitrophe countries rather imperative. They insisted upon settling the matter directly with the Amir's Government.<sup>28</sup>

The Anglo-Russian negotiations were still going on. Lord Lansdowne, in a conversation with Count Benckendorff on April 8, 1903, had reiterated that it would be impossible to make an arrangement with regard to trans-frontier relations without the concurrence of the Amir.<sup>29</sup> In the meanwhile, friction had arisen between Russian and Afghan officials owing to the destruction of the pillars; there were other incident also. The Russians had complained of scarcity of water on their side of the border which they alleged was due to the construction of some new dams by the Afghans on Heri Rud and Murghab rivers.<sup>30</sup> The British Government suggested a British officer attached to the Seistan Boundary Commission and a Russian officer should cooperate for the erection of the pillar.<sup>31</sup>

The Russians adopted dilatory tactics. They were endeavouring to establish locally the practice of direct communications. The Governor of trans-Caspia had asked the Governor of Herat to depute Afghan officials for the restoration of the boundary pillars. The Afghan officials refused to deal with the Russians without the authorisation from Kabul, while the Amir complained to the Indian Government of Russian communications.<sup>32</sup>

Amir Habibullah got a further occasion to assert his independence. He maintained strictly an even attitude of permitting neither the Russians nor the British officers within his territories.<sup>33</sup> In 1903, when the Russians were putting pressure in the north, the Afghan soldiers had arrested

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<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 621, p. (Appendix II—October 1903).

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 517.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, (May 19, 1903).

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 517-518.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 518.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 517.

Lieutenant Colonel A.C. Yate, who trespassed the Indian side of the Afghan border, and was kept as a prisoner for about two weeks.<sup>34</sup>

Without waiting for the Russian reply, a British political officer, H.R.C. Dobbs, was delegated to Herat. The Russians refused to have dealing with Dobbs; and in the absence of any response from the Afghans, they themselves erected the pillars.<sup>35</sup> The Afghan officers also refused to deal any further with the British political officer. Dobbs wanted to utilize his stay in Afghan territory for surveying the Russo-Afghan frontier, for the information strategically required by his government. He was compelled to leave Afghanistan by way of Meshed under the orders of the Amir.<sup>36</sup>

In November 1903, however, there were signs of relaxation in Anglo-Russians tension occasioned by an inter-change of friendly communications between the two governments.<sup>37</sup> Due to the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, both the British and the Russian governments concurred that the negotiations between them on outstanding issues could not be fruitfully continued.<sup>38</sup>

## (ii) Dane's Mission (1905)

By the beginning of the year 1904, there was ample evidence to show that the assessment of Lord Curzon, and his Commander-in-Chief, Lord Kitchener, regarding Habibullah Khan was not correct. The Amir was not at all inclined towards Russia. He had permitted McMahon, Dobbes and other British agents to enter into Afghanistan, and had refused to have any direct relations with Russia; but only through the British Government. The Amir wanted only one thing—to maintain the independence he had inherited. He did not want to come to India because he feared that he might have to circumscribe his position. But, he was willing

<sup>34</sup>Vide Adamec, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>Br. Does., IV, p. 520.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*



to receive a British mission at Kabul, in the hope of getting a better deal from the British Government, perhaps, in terms of his independence officially recognised.

With Lord Curzon on leave in England (April to December 1904), both the Home Government and the acting Viceroy, Lord Ampthill, moved to strike a deal with the Amir. After it became known that Habibullah was willing to accept a British mission to discuss matters and settle all problems between the two parties, Ampthill and Kitchener, in consultation with the Viceroy's Council, sought the permission of the Home Government to conclude a sort of military alliance with Afghan against Russia.<sup>39</sup>

In the suggestion to conclude a formal treaty with the Amir—some kind of military convention—the Indian Government had in mind the possibility of a Russian descent across Afghanistan upon India. Russia considered the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of 1902 directed against her, and it was feared in India that the reverses she suffered during the Russo-Japanese War (1904) might lead her to seek a diversion towards Afghanistan. To provide against this possibility, the Indian Government wanted, apart from retaining control over Afghanistan's external relations, the Amir to provide facilities of transport and communications in order to repel aggression from the north. It also included the provision that in case of hostilities, the Amir would permit the extension of British railways inside Afghan territory and allow the British officers to inspect strategic centres of Afghanistan.

In seeking such far-reaching changes in the existing pattern of relationship with the Amir, the Government of India did not suggest giving any concessions in return. In this form, the British demands would have hardly been attractive to the independent-minded Amir, whose attitude had exasperated no less a person than Lord Curzon. The Amir was known to be willing only to get concessions, rather than himself giving any. Therefore, it is all the more

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<sup>39</sup>Telegram of 21 October 1904; For details see Adamec, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-45. (For. Dept. Sec. F.)

surprising that during Curzon's absence, the acting Viceroy, Lord Ampthill, and his Council could neglect the very basis on which the Amir could be persuaded to accept their demands.

The British Government<sup>40</sup> clearly saw the one-sidedness of the Indian suggestions, and doubted if they could form the basis of a treaty that would be acceptable to the Amir. They saw no reason to change the existing relationship which had worked, more or less, satisfactorily. It was feared that if the Amir resisted British pressure, the Indo-Afghan relations would deteriorate, and that would serve neither the British, nor the Afghan interests, but only of those against whom the proposals were intended to be directed.

Therefore, the Home Government, after consulting Lord Curzon, agreed with the Indian decision for despatching a mission to Kabul under Sir Louis Dane, Secretary to the Government of India, for negotiating a treaty with the Amir, and thereby ending the stalemate that had lately developed in the Anglo-Afghan relations. The envoy was to be guided in the negotiations by specific instructions of the Home Government contained in an *aide memoire*.<sup>41</sup>

The maintenance of a friendly Afghanistan, as a barrier to Russian advance, was the cardinal point of the British policy, and that was to be sustained. It was emphasized that no more should be sought than the absolute control of its foreign relations, while the Amir was to be assured that no interference in the internal administration of Afghanistan was either contemplated or desired. Only a renewal, in the form of a personal treaty, of the engagements with Abdurrahman was envisaged. Dane was to offer the Amir the personal subsidy of 18 lakhs per annum, granted to his father, provided the Amir abided by the stipulations of the treaty and remained friendly to the British Government. The envoy was also to diplomatically broach the question of

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<sup>40</sup>Despatch of Secretary of State, 10 October 1904, F.D.S. (F) and enclosure.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid*.

subsidy withheld in India. The purchase of arms by the Amir would have to be regulated in the form of prior information regarding their import, alongwith an assurance that he would abstain from helping and supplying arms to the frontier tribes. British agents and newswriters at Kabul and other places in Afghanistan should be treated with more courtesy and consideration.

The Indian Government wanted to include, for discussions at Kabul, the feasibility of constructing railroads and telegraph line in Afghanistan; the Home Government considered the matter delicate, to be broached with care. The Amir was dignity-conscious and sensitive, and nothing should be done which he might consider a slur upon his independence, or contrary to his policy. Benefits which would accrue to Afghanistan by a telegraph link with India should be mentioned but not pressed.

Possibilities of more liberal trade relations were to be explored not by treaty as Russia was likely to make a similar demand, but merely in the form of an assurance from the Amir of safe passage for British caravans. The nature of Russo-Afghan commercial relations was also to be examined, perhaps with the object of impressing upon the Amir that such relationship should not be allowed to be converted into a political one, eventually.

The Government of India sought only one change in the terms of reference for Dane's mission, viz., to secure for India the right to send a military force, inside Afghanistan when necessary, for repelling aggression.<sup>42</sup> This the Home Government accepted rather unwillingly. Thus, Dane's task at Kabul was a difficult one : he had to convince Habibullah that the treaty of 1880 was made personally with the late Amir and not with the State of Afghanistan. The Amir was also to be persuaded to accept the British agents for assisting him in matters of defence. Although Dane's brief did not include all what the Government of India desired, their acceptance by the Amir would have increased British influence over Afghanistan and reduced the

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<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, No. 67.

independence which the Amir and his father had so eagerly sought.

With Japan inflicting defeats on Russia in the War of 1904-1905, a new wind of change had started blowing all over Asia. A feeling akin to nationalism became rampant among the peoples of Asia. An Asian nation could defeat the mighty Russia! European hegemony over Asia appeared to have reached the end of its tether.

Thus, when Dane's mission reached Kabul on 12 December 1904, Habibullah considered it a triumph of his diplomacy. Before, in 1870s, the British had turned down Shere Ali's request for a treaty, which made the then Amir turn to Russia. Later, Abdurrahman also wanted a definite treaty which the British Government refused to concede. But this was during the zenith of Britain's power in world affairs; she felt no need of contracting treaties with Afghanistan, which would prove embarrassing and cumbersome. She wanted to keep her options open.

By the turn of the century, however, there were signs of relative and comparative decline of Britain as the sole all-pervading power in world affairs. (The Boer War could be cited as the dividing line between Britain's two positions) She, therefore, started seeking alliances with other powers with Japan in 1902, with France in 1904, and ultimately, with Russia in 1907, to strengthen her capabilities. In regard to Afghanistan as well, the British were tending to reverse their former stand by insisting on positive engagements. But now the Amir had assumed the former role of the British Government. He was reluctant.

While receiving the mission at a formal *darbar*, Habibullah expressed his anxiousness to renew the agreements made by his father with the British Government. Dane, however, did not want a simple renewal of the engagements; the modifications his government had instructed him to suggest were to bind the Amir in a manner as to preclude the possibility of Afghanistan getting any closer to Russia. The Amir's objective was to assert his independence and refuse to serve as a mere pawn on the chessboard

of Indian defence. After expressing his willingness to conduct his foreign relations on the advice of the British Government, he sought British help for defending his country against the growing threat of Russia.

But this was not what the British wanted. The Amir proposed to take advantage of Russia's involvement in war with Japan; he suggested a combined Anglo-Afghan invasion upon her.<sup>43</sup> If Dane accepted the Afghan plan, the Amir was willing to concede the British demands regarding the construction of communications and the stationing of British military personnel on strategic areas within the Afghan territory. Dane found himself in an embarrassing position, and tried to convince the Amir and his advisers that even with the British help it was neither possible nor practicable for the Afghans to achieve against Russia what the Japanese had accomplished. The British Government did not want to involve themselves in a war with Russia: what they desired by the new treaty was that it would serve as a warning to Russia that an attack upon Afghanistan would be considered a *casus belli* by Britain.

Lord Curzon, who had resumed his Viceroyalty, criticized Dane for permitting the negotiations to be dragged to such a stalemate.<sup>44</sup> Dane was further told that he was not authorized to discuss the scheme of joint invasion of Russia which could only be negotiated by the Viceroy himself when the Amir paid a visit to India. The envoy was counselled to sign the treaty and come back. The Afghans, seeing that their own plan was not acceptable to the British envoy, refused to sign the treaty on the basis of the British draft. The situation was further aggravated when the Amir produced a draft treaty of his own, stating that that was the utmost limit to which he would go.

The Afghan negotiators did not attempt to include any of the British proposals in the draft. They were in no mood to sign new treaty that left them with less independence than they had hitherto enjoyed. Having assessed the keenness of the British Government to conclude some sort

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<sup>43</sup>N.A.I., F.S.F, January 1905, No. 118; Adamec, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>44</sup>Adamec, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-64; and Gopal, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-246,



of agreement, they were eager to show that they could resist the pressure of a power like Great Britain. If the British were not prepared to sign a military convention then why, they asked, were insisting on a new treaty and had despatched such a high power mission.

The Amir's position, in brief, was that the engagements were permanent and he was entitled to full subsidy, complete arrears, and unrestricted import of arms; and that he wanted to strengthen the original agreement in the form of his draft treaty which should be accepted and the treaty should be construed as dynastic and his subsidy increased. If the British were prepared to grant these concessions, only then the Amir would be willing to discuss other subsidiary matters raised by the British Government.<sup>45</sup>

To Curzon, giving such far-reaching concessions to Habibullah meant a virtual surrender on the part of the British Government, which would have left the Amir a master of the situation, rather than under the British influence. The negotiations dragged on from the middle of December 1904 to March 21, 1905. At one stage, Curzon was of the opinion that Dane should come back without any treaty than sign the one produced by the Amir.<sup>46</sup> The Home Government, however, felt that the mission's withdrawal from Kabul without any agreement might result in the Amir turning to Russia. The British could not afford taking that risk and advised the signing of the treaty entirely on the Amir's terms.<sup>47</sup>

The Anglo-Afghan treaty,<sup>48</sup> signed on March 21, 1905, was a simple document. The Amir repeated the agreements of 1880, emphasizing that he had acted, was acting and will continue to act upon the engagements entered into by his father with the British Government, and promised not to contravene them in any way, whatsoever. Louis William Dane, who signed the treaty, confirmed the agreements on behalf of the British Government.

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<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup>Text in Appendix XXIV,

In the treaty, however, Habibullah Khan was referred to as 'His Majesty' and 'Independent King of Afghanistan and its dependencies'. The Afghans interpreted this as a British recognition of the independence of Afghanistan. The general tenor of the treaty also lends support to the Afghan contention; it appears to have been concluded between two independent states on the basis of equality and reciprocity. However, the character of the treaty was left vague: there was no mention that it was 'national' or 'dynastic', as contended by the Amir; nor did it include anything to support the British view that the engagements were 'personal', to be renewed with each new Amir.

Lord Curzon was much dissatisfied with the treaty and manner it was allowed to be accepted by his government; in fact, it was a repudiation of his policy. While for the Amir and his advisers, it was no doubt a success; they obtained what they wanted from the mighty British Government, and that too in their own way.

The reason of British acquiescence was that there was no option open to them except dealing toughly with the Amir and possibly intervening military in Afghanistan, a situation which could have resulted in Russia gaining an upper hand at Kabul to the complete exclusion of the British, thereby leading to the establishment of the permanent enemy at the threshold of India. By accepting the Amir's terms the British did not lose much, rather they regained his friendship and goodwill. Contacts established during the mission's three month stay at Kabul proved useful. These gains seemed more substantial and lasting than perhaps anything contained in the treaty.

Some matters were left undecided, like the question of purchase of arms by the Amir. Subsidy was continued and its arrears were paid unconditionally. British control over Afghan foreign relations continued, while they did not object to non-political relations on the Russo-Afghan frontier.

The Indo-Afghan relations improved considerably. It became also clear that the Afghans preferred having intimate

connections with the British rather than with Russians. What they wanted from the British was non-interference in their internal affairs and some stipulation in respect of their independence. By their own interpretation of the treaty, they thought to have secured them both.

Habibullah's suspicion of the British Government and his reticence to parley with the Viceroy, could be ascribed only to the obduracy exhibited by the style of Lord Curzon. Otherwise the Amir was favourably inclined towards the British. It can be deduced from the fact that while Dane was negotiating at Kabul, the Amir's young son, Inayatullah Khan, was allowed to pay a courtesy visit to India in December 1904. And when Curzon was gone, Habibullah accepted the invitation of the new Viceroy, Lord Minto, for visiting India in early 1907.

There was some difference of opinion among the Indian officials whether the Afghan ruler should be accorded the title 'His Majesty', and whether he should be received with thirty-one-gun salute reserved only for the rulers of sovereign independent states. The controversy was set aside by King Edward VII who addressed the Amir as 'Your Majesty' in a telegram of greetings.<sup>49</sup> Habibullah was received and entertained with courtesy and cordiality, and he himself exhibited extreme friendliness and enjoyed himself thoroughly.

Although, the Amir declined to discuss political matters, his visit strengthened the bonds of understanding and friendship between the two countries. While the Amir impressed his hosts with his broad mindedness, culture, strength of character, and by his shrewdness and intelligence, he was in turn, much impressed by the might of the British Empire and the calibre of the English people. As a result of what he saw in India, the Amir felt the need of introducing some reforms in Afghanistan, by strengthening the means of communications and overhauling the administration.

The only thing purporting to politics which Habibullah expressed was his fear of Russia, and reiterated his firm

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<sup>49</sup>Referred to in Singhal, *op. cit.*, p. 173,

commitment to engagements with Great Britain, provided the British reciprocated it in equal measure. In a conversation with Dane, he implied that he had no wish to alter the present relationship with the British, nor the border relations with the Russians which were merely non-political in nature. At the conclusion of the visit as well. Habibullah received a telegram of personal greetings from King Edward VII.

It can be said that whatever gap was left in the way of an amicable understanding between the Indian and the Afghan Governments by 1905 treaty was more than filled by Habibullah's visit.

### (iii) Towards the Anglo-Russian Rapprochement (1907).

In February 1905, during the Anglo-Afghan negotiations at Kabul, the Russians had expressed concern lest the British Government be seeking to alter the then existing pattern of Indo-Afghan relations by annexing or occupying Afghan territory. Lord Lansdowne, the British Foreign Secretary, had to assure the Russian Ambassador in London, Count Benckendorff, that the British policy had undergone no alteration whatever, that the British Government wished to maintain the same relations with the Amir as with his predecessors, and had no intention, of either appropriating Afghan territory or of interfering in the internal affairs of that country. The British Government, however, continued to claim that Afghanistan should remain free from the influence or interference of any foreign power, and that the Amir's relations with other countries should remain in their hands. In return Lord Lansdowne sought a similar assurance on the part of the Russian Government for maintaining *status quo* in their policy and intentions towards Afghanistan, and regarding it 'as wholly outside the sphere of their influence.'<sup>50</sup> In case of such an assurance forthcoming from the Russian Government, the British were prepared to make a concession by allowing the inter-change of communications between the Russian and the Afghan frontier officials on non-political matters of a local character—a concession the Russian

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<sup>50</sup>Br. Docs., IV, pp. 520-521, Lansdowne to Benckendorff, 17 February 1907.

Government had so persistently sought and contrived to get. The Russian Government declined to give a formal assurance.<sup>51</sup> Count Benckendorff was, however, satisfied with the statement of the British views. The Russians desired that Afghanistan should remain a 'buffer state', and they would abstain from interference with her independence and integrity.

The extent to which the Anglo-Russian negotiations influenced the British Government to over-rule Lord Curzon regarding the nature of the Indo-Afghan treaty of March 21, 1905, can only be visualised; as seen earlier, there was a marked change in the British stand on the terms of the treaty from December 1904, the time Kabul parleys began, to March 21, 1905, when the treaty was eventually concluded. At that time, however, no Anglo-Russian understanding could be reached. But the Russian Government's mention of Afghanistan as a 'buffer state' was significant in that it was indicative of the way they had started thinking about Afghanistan.

The Anglo-Japanese treaty of 1902, which was renewed in 1905, was an important factor in Russian hesitation to make a deal with Great Britain. The treaty contained a provision that, in the event of either party becoming involved in war with a third power, the other party was to remain neutral, unless any other power or powers joined in the hostilities against that ally, when the 'other contracting party will come to its assistance.'<sup>52</sup> The agreement of August 12, 1905 had further bound the two parties to come to each other's assistance in case of unprovoked attack on either party by any third power; the agreement also contained a clause recognising the 'special interests' of the two parties in 'eastern Asia and India'. This treaty was 'conveniently' renewed before the Russo-Japanese peace could be concluded on August 23, 1905. For the Russians, the treaty had implications for the Afghan policy

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<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 521, Lansdowne to Hardinge, 8 March 1905.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 128-131 & 165-169, for the drafts and the texts of the treaties.



of the Government of India, and was, therefore, directed against them,<sup>53</sup> they feared that the British Government had some ulterior motives towards the Russian possessions of Central Asia and their 'special interests' in Persia.<sup>54</sup>

The Russian Foreign Minister, Count Lamsdorff, had, in October 1905, apprised the British Ambassador, Sir Charles Hardinge, of the most unfavourable impression the Anglo-Japanese treaty had created in Russian Government circles, and of the overt hostility of the Russian Press.<sup>55</sup> The British Ambassador tried to mollify the Russians; he pointed out that Russia had, at great cost, constructed a series of strategical railways to the frontiers of Afghanistan, a country which the Russian Government had frequently declared to be outside their sphere of influence. If the object of the railway advance was not to facilitate an attack upon Afghanistan or India, it was at least intended to act as a perpetual means of exerting pressure on the British by military movements on the Afghan frontier; in any case it constituted a menace to the security of India.<sup>56</sup> The British also emphasized that they had taken precautions not to contract anything with the Afghan Amir which could give umbrage to the Russians. In spite of the British protestations, the Russians demanded a more comprehensive statement in plain and clear terms of the extent and nature of British intentions and claims in Asia in view of the controversial stipulations of the Anglo-Japanese treaty.

When the negotiations concerning Afghanistan were reopened in February 1907, several important changes had occurred in the arena of world politics which variously and in combination led to the crystallization of a situation that made the Anglo-Russian rapprochement rather inevitable.

The year 1905 witnessed far-reaching changes in the political make-up of Russia and Great Britain. Russia,

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<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 203-207.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 203-204, Enclosure in No. 193.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 206, Hardinge to Lansdowne, 5 October 1905.

after suffering defeat at the hands of Japan, was considerably weakened. The revolutionary upsurge of 1905, and the establishment of Duma under the bourgeois democrats displaced the militarists from power and seemingly liberalized Russia's power-structure. In the wake of these changes the direction of Russian foreign policy fell into the hands of Alexander Isvolski, who was more conscious of the need of having friendly rather than competitive and conflictual relationship with Great Britain. The elections of 1905 had swept the liberals into power in Britain, with Edward Grey as Foreign Secretary, John Morley as Secretary of State for India and Lord Minto as the Viceroy. Morley and Minto favoured radical constitutional reforms in India and more liberal policy towards Afghanistan, while Grey desired an understanding with Russia on Central Asian questions in view of the political situation then obtaining in Europe. The predominance of Germany on the continent had scared France, Great Britain and Russia alike. The expansion of the German navy was threatening British hegemony on the seas, while the construction of the Berlin-Baghdad railway was posing a check on Russian ambitions and endangering British imperial interests.

The immutable law of balance of power<sup>57</sup> which had already brought Britain and France, France and Russia into the fold of alignments, was also pushing Britain and Russia towards each other. The Anglo-Russian negotiations, which started with a sort of predisposition on the part of the two parties to reach agreement, were concerned only with matters of secondary detail. The negotiations, although prolonged to about fifteen months (from May 1906 to August 1907), were essentially geared to resolving differences and adjusting conflicting view points so as to bring them in conformity with the predetermined course of concord.

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<sup>57</sup>For a brilliant exposition of British policy and the nature of balance of power, see the 'Memorandum by Eyre Crowe on the Present State of British relations with France and Germany, January 1, 1907,' *vide* Br. Docs., III, p. 397 *et seq.*

With the Ottoman Empire having thrown its lot with the Germans, the one important factor which had plagued Anglo-Russian relations during the nineteenth century had now ceased to exist. The Russians had to climb down from their former stand that Persia should exclusively remain under their sphere of influence, as it then became apparent that a joint Anglo-Russian endeavour was required to check the German penetration into the area via the Baghdad railway. It was, however, a concession on the part of Russia to agree to divide Persia into spheres of influence with the British. The Russians had once again to give up their long cherished ambition of getting a warm water outlet on the Persian Gulf, while the British, by their zone of influence in the south-east of Persia, precluded the possibility of the Russians gaining proximity by land to either the Afghan or the British frontiers. The inclusion of the port of Bander Abbas in the British sphere was an added advantage for the control of the Persian Gulf.

On the question of direct relations with Afghanistan, the Government of India objected to giving treaty concessions to Russia even for non-political matters of local concern of the Russo-Afghan frontier. Lord Minto and his Commander-in-Chief, Lord Kitchener, feared that such concessions were likely to give Russia a direct say in Afghan affairs which would not only be to the detriment of India's security but a negation of the very principle on which the British frontier policy was based.<sup>58</sup> The British Government, however, due to the compulsions of international expediency, as well as by the feeling that an Anglo-Russian agreement would serve to strengthen India's security, went ahead to sign the convention on August 31, 1907.

The convention embraced three agreements, one each on Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet.

The part concerning Afghanistan<sup>59</sup> was on the whole more favourable to Great Britain. The Russian Government

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<sup>58</sup>N. A. I., For. Sec. F, June 1907, Nos. 491 & 493 -- Notes.

<sup>59</sup>Text of the Convention concerning Afghanistan in Philips, *op. cit.*, pp. 485-6.

for the first time formally committed to treat Afghanistan outside their sphere of influence, while their insistence on defining Afghanistan as a 'buffer state' was not found acceptable to the British Government.<sup>60</sup> They also engaged to conduct their political relations with Afghanistan through the intermediary of the British Government. On their part, the British Government declared to abide by the Anglo-Afghan treaty stipulations (1905) and not to interfere in the internal affairs of the country provided the Amir also fulfilled the contracted engagements. In other word, the Amir was still to remain under British control in matters of foreign relations.

Russia gained only in terms of local questions of a non-political nature; such questions could be settled, without reference to the British Government, between the Russian and the Afghan officials on the frontier. The principle of equality of commercial opportunity in Afghanistan was also recognised between the two parties.

The main controversy arose with regard to the fifth article which provided that the convention would come into force, when the British Government had obtained the consent of the Amir to the stipulations and notified it to their Russian counterpart. Amir Habibullah Khan showed considerable hesitancy when asked to adhere to the convention.<sup>61</sup> He was annoyed that the agreement was negotiated and adopted without even informing him. His persistent policy was to keep Afghanistan completely independent, and to that end, he wanted to refrain from having any closer relations with either of the two big neighbours, while the convention envisaged just the opposite — much closer relations with both powers than hitherto existed. He must have known that in another part of the convention, Persia was divided, and consequently his fear that if he consented to what the two powers had decided among themselves regarding his own country, Afghanistan might one day suffer a similar fate.

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<sup>60</sup>Br. Docs., IV, p. 535.

<sup>61</sup>For Amir's attitude, see *Ibid.*, pp. 574-577, 587 & 614; and N A.I., For. Sec. F, Nos. 94-128, Oct. 1908, also Adamec, *op. cit.*, Chap. 4.

Several explanations were offered on the part of the Indian Government that the convention was in no way a slight upon Afghan independence but to the contrary: the Russians had accepted it formally, and the Afghan relations had been properly regulated to ensure propriety in the conduct of the two powers, all this failed to appease or convince the Amir and his advisers.<sup>62</sup> The spirit of Asian nationalism generated by Japan's victory over Russia came to be manifested among the Afghans as well. They refused to accept a treaty derogatory to their dignity and subversive of their independence. The Anglo-Afghan relations which developed in the wake of Amir's recent visit to India, lessened in cordiality.

In face of the Afghan refusal, the British feared that the efficacy of the entire convention would greatly be weakened and impaired, although the other parts concerning Persia and Tibet might remain operative. It was also feared that when the British were unable to influence the Afghan 'potentate', the Russian Government would consider them useless intermediaries, and attempt direct political dealings with Afghanistan.<sup>63</sup> However, the Russian Foreign Minister, M. Isvolski dispelled British fears by showing his willingness 'to act upon the assumption that the convention concerning Afghanistan was in force, although the consent of the Amir had not yet been received.'<sup>64</sup> Thus the British and the Russian Governments finally arranged to consider that the agreement had come into force without the Amir's consent being necessary. In fact, consent of the Amir could never be obtained.

However, all was not lost for the Indo-Afghan relations. That the Amir's refusal was to show his independence and to cause a little friction but not a deterioration to the extent of a complete break with the British, became more than evident subsequently.

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<sup>62</sup>N.A.I., *op. cit.*, No. 111, 14 August 1908.

<sup>63</sup>Br. Docs., IV, p. 575, Nicolson to Grey, 19 July 1908.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 276-277, Nicolson to Grey, 3, 9 November 1908.



Britain's only consolation from the convention was the Russian acceptance of their special position in respect of Afghanistan. Refusing to adhere to the convention was not the only advantage which the Amir derived from not having been consulted in its formulations; he used the occasion for setting his astute diplomacy in motion towards achieving more freedom from British control. In November 1907, Habibullah rejected Lord Minto's choice of an Indian Muslim as agent in Afghanistan, and the Viceroy did not press the matter because the Amir was invoking a privilege of the sovereign states of Europe among whom the accreditation of ambassador was invariably subject to the acceptance of the government of the country to which the envoy was to be accredited. Similarly, the British Government refrained from insisting on 'consular immunity' for their agents in Afghanistan because they would have to concede an Afghan demand of reciprocity, and that would have been tantamount to a recognition of Afghanistan as a sovereign independent state.<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, the Durand agreements of 1893 were not strictly based on topographical and ethnological considerations but on strategic and political expediency. Habibullah like his father Abdurrahman, evaded the British attempts to establish on the spot demarcations with any accuracy and precision. He wanted the tribal belt in a fluid state, as a buffer zone for keeping the British line of actual and effective control at a distance from the borders of Afghanistan. The people of the tribal area had specialised in stealing rifles from the British garrisons, and the British punitive measures against the tribes were looked with askance by the Amir and the Afghan Government. The Russian border was also kept alive, and, although, for settling local dispute, Afghan and the Russian officials did have an exchange of correspondence, but the terms of the convention were scarcely mentioned.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>For references see Adamec, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-82.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*

In brief, the Afghans not only refused to formally accept the convention, but by their actions and inactions deprived the two powers to achieve, by and large, anything that was contained or implied in the stipulations. As a matter of fact, the Afghans felt that the Anglo-Russian convention of 1907, both in tenor and spirit, was against the Anglo-Afghan treaty of 1905. They were fully conscious of the implications of the agreement and saw in it a subtle attempt on the part of the British Government to barter away Afghan independence.

As the Afghans were successful in resisting the Anglo-Russian pressures, thereby neutralizing the effects of the convention inimical to the integrity and independence of their country, they could dispassionately reappraise their attitude towards their relations with the British Government. It was in keeping with Afghanistan's national interest that the Amir withstood the German and Turkish pressures during World War I and remained loyal to the engagements with the British Government.

#### **(iv) Lessons of Afghan Experience**

At the end of the discussion, however, three important strands may briefly be noted: the nature of Anglo-Russian rivalry in Afghanistan; the existence and survival of Afghanistan as a political entity; and finally the conceptual development of a 'buffer state' in the light of the Afghan experience.

##### **(a) The Nature of Anglo-Russian rivalry**

The expansions of Great Britain and Russia towards the peripheries of Afghanistan were different in character, rather diametrically opposed to each other in respect of the nature of their development.

Emanating from the insular position of the British Isles, sea power was basic to the expansion of great Britain.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>The classical treatment is contained in A.T. Mahon, *Influence of Sea Power on History*. See also Michael Lewis, *The History of British Navy* (Penguin 1957), and A.H. Bilgrami, *Britain, the Commonwealth and European Union Issue*, Chap. 1,

In the long course of their expansive history, therefore, the British had resisted the temptation of coming into contact with land based powers on a frontier accessible only by land. Once they had controlled the sea routes of India, their attention was naturally directed towards the land routes that separated their possessions from the Asian hinterland.

As, throughout this period, there was no foreseeable danger to India from the north with formidable Himalayas, and in the east with mountains and jungles of Assam and Burma, the British rulers remained concentratedly occupied with the Afghan frontier where lay historical routes of invasion. Thus the North-west frontier became the focus of their attention; it became the only land frontier of consequence and import whose problems the insular genius of the British empire builders were called upon to tackle.

It was largely through Zaman Shah's invasions (1793-1800) and Napoleon's grandiose scheme of invading India via Iran and Afghanistan that made the British conscious of the strategic importance of Afghanistan. The twin threats from the North-west were neutralized by the prevalence of anarchy in Afghanistan and the defeat of Napoleon in Europe. Then came the Russian threat, which, in the beginning indirectly manifested itself via Persia, as the Russian power had yet to make its presence felt on the northern borders of Afghanistan. The Central Asian potentates were still at large.

The significant fact for the British was that the power of the Russian Empire was essentially based on land. Russia's power pervaded the most of what H.J. Mackinder<sup>68</sup> termed the 'Heartland' of the world. She could maintain a huge land army, and expand on land with considerable ease and facility. This became all the more dangerous and frightful for Great Britain when Russia directed her attention towards Afghanistan. Britain could ill-afford to maintain a huge navy to police the oceans, to protect her

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<sup>68</sup>See his *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (Pelican, 1944), and *Britain and the British Seas* (Oxford, 1902).

trade routes and world-wide empire, and at the same time to have a land army capable of protecting India against Russia—a power with no responsibilities on the seas, and wholly oriented to maintain huge land armies.

The two expensive wars which the British fought against the Afghans brought home the point how difficult it was for them to prepare to defend themselves against the land based Russian army. In spite of hints emanating from some British militarists for making Afghanistan a spring-board of invasion and conquest of Central Asia, due to the very inadequacy of resources Britain could not afford 'to be a military power with forces on a continental scale'<sup>69</sup> so as to be able to challenge the Russian power on land. The same was also true of the capabilities of the Russian empire; how difficult it proved for them to subjugate the Khanates of Central Asia, not to speak of implementing the various schemes of launching a successful invasion of India, after subjugating the turbulent people of Afghanistan.<sup>70</sup>

In realistic terms it is better to visualize that both the powers wanted to play a diplomatic game of political bargaining and pressure tactics rather than resorting to an armed confrontation. They were imperialists alright; but to postulate that they could not comprehend the hazards of a precipitate armed conflict which was most likely to result in nothing else but disaster, is both hypothetical and untenable.

In the early part of the nineteenth century when the Russian influence was still at a distance from the northern borders of Afghanistan and the kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a barrier between British possession and the land of the Afghans, the only place where the British and the Russians competed with each other for influence was Persia. In 1830s, Russia attempted to extend her influence over Afghanistan, by using Persia and inciting Afghan rulers against the British. The British militarily

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<sup>69</sup>Br. Docs., IV, p. 207, Hardinge to Lansdowne, 4 October 1905.

<sup>70</sup>A.I.G. *op. cit.*, 25 September 1863, pp. 621-623.

intervened in Afghanistan (1838-1842), and thus, precluded the possibility of Russia gaining any hold there. In the ensuing two decades, the British influence extended upto the very frontiers of Afghanistan.

An important contributing factor in the evolution of Anglo-Russian rivalry was the 'Eastern Question'. Russia moved to dominate the Ottoman Empire and to force her way into the warm waters of the Mediterranean via the Turkish straits. Great Britain helped to sustain the dropping sovereignty of the Ottomans, and sought to prevent Russia from entering into the Mediterranean and endangering the British imperial life-line.

Thwarted in Europe, Russia sought diversion in Central Asia by pressurizing Britain via Afghanistan. Skobeloff cogently explained the objective: 'The stronger Russia in Central Asia, the weaker England is in India and the more conciliatory she will be in Europe.' Thus, each time there was a crisis in Europe involving Britain and Russia on opposite sides each time Russia made a move towards Afghanistan.

And, the nearer Russia got in Central Asia, the more problematic it became for Britain to plan her Indian defence. There arose two schools of thought: one advocating a forward line of defence on the Hindu Kush, either by keeping Afghanistan well under British influence, or occupying that country and meeting Russia on the Oxus—this school came to be associated with the Conservative Party in England. The other policy associated with John Lawrence, was of non-interference in Afghan affairs and preparation to meet Russia on the Indian frontier or even at the Indus. Its advocates believed that 'Prosperity and goodwill of Afghans and a peaceful frontier with military roads and proper communication via Karachi could be better and surer guarantee of India's defence against Russia.'<sup>71</sup> This school had its supporters in the Liberal party.

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<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 28 March 1868, pp. 203-204,



British frontier policy consequently suffered from indecision, was constantly in a state of flux, changing, more or less, with every change of Government at London. Lord Lytton, acting on behalf of the Tory Government of Disraeli, once more militarily intervened to prevent Russia from gaining influence at Kabul.

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, when the Russian borders in Central Asia became co-terminous with those of Afghanistan, an Anglo-Russian confrontation became likely. That both the powers rather chose to compose their differences was largely due to the changes in the balance of power in Europe. The emergence of powerful, militant and ambitious Germany and the development of her economic and political hold over the Ottoman Empire, compelled Britain to seek the cooperation of France and Russia to block the German aspirations for a *Drang nach Osten*.<sup>72</sup> This brought to an end the Eastern Question, the major irritant between Russia and Great Britain that had plagued their relations throughout the nineteenth century, and paved the way for the rapprochement of 1907. It also became indicative of the extent to which the Central Asian issue was a reaction of the Eastern Question; once the latter disappeared, a settlement over the former became inevitable.

This was perhaps a unique imperial and colonial reconciliation, but it became imminent not because imperial interests were reconcilable, but their reconcilability had become expedient due to the convergence of national interests.

There was yet another factor in the Anglo-Russian adjustment. Russian expansion in Central Asia was viewed, at least, by some responsible Britishers with satisfaction. They considered it an expansion of European civilization and a more stabilizing factor in the areas hitherto infested with warring and turbulent nomads. Even the Afghans were not easily manageable. Therefore, the consolidation

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<sup>72</sup>Sidney N. Fisher, *The Middle East*, London, 1960, p. 336,

of Russian power in Central Asia proved an added advantage to the British as it removed the instability of political conditions and facilitated the task of Anglo-Russian settlement.

### **(b) Afghanistan as a Political Entity**

The existence of Afghanistan, after remaining hedged between the two coveting imperialists, is ascribed more to the antagonism between the two powers rather than the skilful part played by the Afghans themselves in ensuring the survival of their country as a political entity.

The story begins with Dost Mohammad Khan, whose emergence as the ruler of Kabul was in itself a great feat, accomplished with considerable sagacity and enterprize. Over a quarter of a century of incessant struggle, he once more brought his country out of the ashes of the Durrani Empire. In 1830s, although he was only the ruler of Kabul (Kandahar and Herat being under two other rulers), it is appreciably notable how well he anticipated and understood the game Britain and Russia were to play. In spite of the limitations of being a small potentate, he tried to use his cards well by playing Russia against Britain and *vice versa*, for gaining concessions and securing the survival of his kingdom.

After Auckland's misadventure of 1838-42, Dost Mohammad Khan emerged as the saviour of Afghan Independence which helped him in consolidating his rule and in bringing Kandahar, Herat and other parts of Afghanistan within his fold. The war had also generated a sort of national spirit among his people which greatly helped in the unification of Afghanistan. The one lesson which the war taught Dost Mohammad was, not to buy unnecessary antagonism of the British Government; rather a friendship with them would serve the interests of Afghanistan better.

The Civil War which ensued after his death tended to undo what Dost Mohammad had accomplished. Shere Ali Khan proved to be a rash and nervous ruler. He spoiled the game by overplaying his hand. That he could go to the Russians by totally breaking with the British was against

the nature of Afghan diplomacy. The only lever permissible for them was to use Russian alibi for getting concessions for the British.

The Second Afghan War, which might have been a tragedy for the British, proved to be a boon for the Afghans. They got rid of the rash and sentimental ruler; national feeling for independence was once more regenerated; and finally, they received as prize, a shrewd and sagacious ruler in Sirdar Abdurrahman Khan, who by his wisdom, patience and fortitude laid the foundations of their independence.

Not in spite of his Russian past, but perhaps because of it, Abdurrahman had come to believe that the good of Afghanistan lay in friendship with the British and not with the Russians. While cultivating the British, he also successfully resisted their attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. He tried to gain equality and reciprocity while dealing with them. And, by his shrewd diplomacy, he kept alive in the considerations of the British Government the persistence of the Russian threat to India.

Habibullah proved a worthy successor to Abdurrahman. In successive acts of astute statesmanship, he furthered the cause of Afghan independence: by remaining silent over Curzon's overtures and refusing to accept the Viceroy's invitation, then by accepting Dane's mission to Kabul and getting the better of the British by compelling them to sign a treaty on his own terms.

In a way, an Anglo-Russian reconciliation was likely to prove more dangerous to Afghanistan than their century-long antagonism which had ensured the survival of that country as a political entity. Therefore, Habibullah's refusal to accept the convention of 1907 was indicative of the fact that he knew precisely what the national interest of Afghanistan was. His subsequent dealings with Britain and Russia showed the consummate skill with which he laid secure foundations of sovereignty and independence of his Kingdom,

Refusing to accept the Anglo-Russian alliance, and remaining neutral during World War I, in the face of German and Turkish overtures, were not only acts of statesmanship, but indicative of a sound basis of a policy of 'non-alignment' which a small and weak country can afford to follow *vis-a-vis* powerful nations.

### (c) Afghanistan as a Buffer State

The term 'buffer state' was used during the Anglo-Russian negotiations concerning their respective shares of influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia, in early 1870s. The exact phrases used were 'neutral zone', 'neutral territory' and 'buffer zone', which the two powers desired to be recognized. In the agreement of 1873, however, Afghanistan could not be accepted as a buffer, which the Russians had to concede as beyond their sphere of influence. From 1900 onwards, the Russian Government tried to get the approval of their British counterpart for declaring Afghanistan as a 'buffer state'. As the British Government considered Afghanistan within their own sphere of influence, they did not permit it to be declared a 'buffer state' in the convention of 1907.

Technically, a buffer state<sup>73</sup> is understood to be a weak and small independent state which is situated between two or more competing powers; it separates them from physical contact, thereby diminishing the possibilities of friction. Such a state is expected to follow a policy of equidistance from, or of equal proximity with, its powerful neighbours and lessen tensions between them by acting as a shock absorber. It is the interest of such a state that its powerful neighbours should not clash, as it would endanger her own existence. The preservation of the integrity and independence of such a buffer state also becomes the interest of the contending powers, as each tries to prevent its falling completely into the sphere of the other.

<sup>73</sup>For a fuller treatment, see Mary Barnes Gear, "Role of Buffer States in International Relations", *Journal of Geography*, March 1941; also Chap. XVII in W.A. Douglas Jackson, *Politics and Geographic Relationships*, particularly Stephen B. Jone's article pp. 374-384.

Afghanistan measures up fairly well to the physical requirement of a buffer. It is bounded by high and most rugged mountains, and the passes through them are deep and narrow which remain blocked by snow a considerable part of the year. It lacks natural resources that could be coveted by its neighbours.<sup>74</sup> Its people and rulers have also exhibited inclination and sagacity to remain free from influence and interference of the powerful neighbours.

Practically, however, Afghanistan was under the British sphere of influence, and twice in the nineteenth century the British did not hesitate to use force to maintain their exclusive control. But, in the later part of the nineteenth century, when the Russians got nearer to Afghanistan, the possibilities of its becoming an independent buffer also tended to grow. Political stability under Abdurrahman gave vent to the expression of a strong and independent Afghanistan. The Russians were persisting for having direct relations with Afghanistan, which the British Government were prepared to accept only in principle and not formally; they relied on the Amir's concurrence for preventing the increase in Russian influence. Britain's seeking of the Amir's consent for settling matters concerning Afghanistan with Russia, implied in it a sort of recognition of Afghanistan's independence in a political sense.

The Russians, by their own internal and external compulsions, had to come to terms with the situation. What they meant by Afghanistan as a 'buffer state' was in practical terms no more than a slight relaxation in British control over her foreign relations in the form of some non-political contacts on the Russo-Afghan border, leaving Afghan foreign political relations under the exclusive control of the Government of British India.

Habibullah Khan did the rest in making Afghanistan from largely a natural buffer to a political one as well. He resisted the British pressures so successfully as to get himself recognized an independent king in the treaty of 1905. Add to this his diplomacy in the wake of the Convention of

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<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*



1907 which neutralized the stipulations that restricted his independence. The ruler also thwarted the attempts of both Britain and Russia in getting any untoward concessions whatsoever.

The chain of events that perfected Afghanistan as a real buffer state ended when, during World War I, Habibullah remained neutral despite the German and Turkish overtures. It was, however, left to Amanullah Shah to declare Afghanistan a completely independent and sovereign state in 1919.

# Appendices

## I

### **Sir John Malcolm's Treaty with Persia,\* January 1800.**

- 1 This treaty of friendship between the two empires of British and Persia shall remain in force till the sun shines on those empires and illuminates the earth. Henceforward there will be no discord and hostility between these empires.
- 2 In case the king of Afghanistan intended to invade India, the people of India being the subjects of British emperor, it is hereby agreed that the authorities of Persia shall move a powerful army into Afghanistan to devastate and ruin that territory sparing no effort in creating harassment to the Afghans.
- 3 In case the king of Afghanistan inclined himself to express a friendly gesture towards Persia and a treaty of friendship were signed with him, the Government of Persia will include the condition that no Afghan army shall ever invade India; and that the King of Afghanistan shall not plan to encroach upon India which is a part of British empire.
- 4 In case the king of Afghanistan or an authority of French nation attempted to make war on Persia, the British Government shall place at the disposal of the officials of Persia all types of guns and the necessary military equipment stored in the ports of Persia.
- 5 In case a French army landed at a port of Persia with a certain specific objective or with a treacherous design, the two governments of Britain and Persia will form a joint command and their combined armies will move to turn them out. The British

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\*Translated by Dr. S. Nabi Hadi from a Persian Text in Ahmad Taj Baksh, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

Government will specially undertake in such a situation to supply the military equipment and other provisions needed to the Government of Persia. It is also agreed that if anyone of the French Nations asked the favour of the Government of Persia to grant permission of using as station a port or an island, such a request shall not be granted.

## II

### **Preliminary Treaty With Persia, Concluded by Sir Harford Jones, March 21, 1809**

- 1 That as some time will be required to arrange and form a definitive treaty of alliance and friendship between the two high states, and as the circumstances of the world make it necessary for something to be done without loss of time, it is agreed these articles, which are to be regarded as preliminary, shall become a basis for establishing a sincere and everlasting definitive treaty of strict friendship and union...
- 2 His Majesty the King of Persia judges it necessary to declare that from the date of these preliminary articles, every treaty or agreement he may have made with anyone of the power of Europe becomes null and void, and that he will not permit any European force whatever to pass through Persia, either towards India, or towards the ports of that country.
- 3 In case any European forces have invaded, or shall invade, the territories of His Majesty the King of Persia, his Britannic Majesty will afford to his Majesty the king of Persia, a force, or, in lieu of it, a subsidy, with warlike ammunition, such as guns, muskets etc., and officers to the amount that may be to the advantage of both parties, for the expulsion of the force so invading; and the number of these forces, or the amount of the subsidy, ammunition, etc., shall be hereafter regulated in the definitive treaty. In case His Majesty the King of England should make peace with

such European power, his Britannic Majesty shall use his utmost endeavours to negotiate and procure a peace between His Persian Majesty and such power. But if (which God forbid) his Britannic Majesty's efforts for this purpose should fail of success, then the forces or subsidy, according to the amount mentioned in the definitive treaty, shall still continue in the service of the King of Persia as long as the said European forces shall remain in the territories of his Persian Majesty, or until peace is concluded between His Persian Majesty and the said European power. And it is further agreed, that in case the dominions of his Britannic Majesty in India are attacked or invaded by the Afghans or any other power, His Majesty the King of Persia shall afford a force for the protection of the said dominions, according to the stipulations contained in the definitive treaty.

- 4 If a detachment of British troops has arrived from India in the Gulf of Persia, and, by the consent of His Persian Majesty, landed on the island of Karrak, or at any of the Persian ports, they shall not in any manner possess themselves of such places; and from the date of these preliminary articles, the said detachment shall be at the disposal of His Majesty, the King of Persia, except his Excellency the Governor General of India, judges such detachment necessary for the defence of India, in which case they shall be returned to India, and a subsidy, in lieu of the personal services of these troops shall be paid to His Majesty the King of Persia, the amount of which shall be settled in the definitive treaty.
- 5 In case war takes place between His Persian Majesty and the Afghans, His Majesty the King of Great Britain shall not take any part therein, unless it be at the desire of both parties, to afford his mediation for peace.

## III

**Treaty With Ranjeet Singh, The Rajah of Lahore****April 25, 1809**

Whereas certain differences which had arisen between the British Government and the Rajah of Lahore have been happily and amicably adjusted; and both parties being anxious to maintain the relations of perfect amity and concord, the following articles of treaty, which shall be binding on the heirs and successors of the two parties, have been concluded by Rajah Ranjeet Singh on his own part, and by the agency of Charles Theophilus Metcalfe, Esquire on the part of the British Government.

- 1 Perpetual friendship shall subsist between the British Government and the State of Lahore. The latter shall be considered, with respect to the former, to be on the footing of the most favoured powers; and the British Government will have no concern with the territories and subjects of the Rajah to the northward of the river Sutlej.
- 2 The Rajah will never maintain, in the territory occupied by him and his dependents on the left bank of the river Sutlej, more troops than are necessary for the internal duties of that territory, nor commit, or suffer any encroachment on the possessions or rights of the chiefs in its vicinity.
- 3 In the event of a violation of any of the preceding articles, or of a departure from the rules of friendship, on the part of either state, this treaty shall be considered null and void.

## IV

**Mountstuart Elphinstone's Treaty With Shah Shuja,****King of Kabul, June 17, 1809**

Whereas, in consequence of the confederacy with the state of Persia, projected by the French for the purpose of invading the dominions of His Majesty the King of the Duranees, and, ultimately those of British Government, in



India, the Honourable Mountstuart Elphinstone was despatched to the Court of His Majesty, in quality of envoy plenipotentiary, on the part of the Right Honourable Lord Minto, Governor General, exercising the supreme authority over all affairs, civil, political, and military, in the British possessions in the East Indies, for the purpose of concerting with His Majesty's ministers the means of mutual defence against the expected invasion of the French and Persian; and whereas the said ambassador, having had the honour of being presented to His Majesty, and of explaining the friendly and beneficial object of his mission, His Majesty, sensible of the advantages of alliance and co-operation between the two states for the purpose above described, directed his ministers to confer with the Honourable Mountstuart Elphinstone, and, consulting the welfare of both states, to conclude a friendly alliance; and certain articles of treaty having accordingly been agreed to between His Majesty's ministers and the British ambassador, and confirmed by the royal signet, copy of the treaty so framed has been transmitted by the ambassador for the ratification of the Governor General, who, consenting to the stipulations therein contained, without variation, a copy of these articles, as hereunder written: is now returned, duly ratified by the seal and signature of the Governor General, and the signatures of the member of the British Government in India. And the obligations upon both Governments, both now and for ever, shall be exclusively regulated and determined by the tenor of those articles, which are as follows:

- 1 As the French and Persians have entered into a confederacy against the state of Caubul, if they should wish to pass through the king's dominions, the servants of the heavenly throne shall prevent their passage, and, exerting themselves to the extent of their power in making war on them and repelling them, shall not permit them to cross into British India.
- 2 If the French and Persians, in pursuance of their confederacy, should advance towards the King of

Caubul's country, in a hostile manner, the British state, endeavouring heartily to repel them, shall hold themselves liable to afford the expenses necessary for the above mentioned service, to the extent of their ability. While the confederacy between the French and Persians continues in force, these articles shall be in force, and be acted on by both parties.

- 3 Friendship and union shall continue for ever between these two states. The veil of separation shall be lifted up from between them, and they shall in no manner interfere in each other's countries; and the King of Caubul shall permit no individual of the French to enter his territories.

## V

### Treaty With the Ameers of Sindh

August 22. 1809.

- 1 There shall be eternal friendship between the British Government and that of Sindh--namely, Meer Ghulam Alee Meer Kurreem Alee and Meer Murad Alee.
- 2 Enmity shall never appear between the two states.
- 3 The mutual despatch of the vakeels of both Govts. namely, the British Govt. and Sindhian Government, shall always continue.
- 4 The Government of Sindh will not allow the establishment of the tribe of the French in Sindh.

## YI(A)

### Definitive Treaty with Persia, Concluded At Tehran, By Messrs. James Morier & Henry Ellis

25 November 1814.

Prior to this period, the high in station, Sir Harford Jones, Baronet, Envoy Extraordinary from the English Government, came to this court to form an amicable alliance, and, in conjunction with the plenipotentiaries of Persia,

their excellencies Meerza Mahomed Sheffeeh, and Hajee Mahomed Hussein Khan, concluded a preliminary treaty ..

- 1 The Persian Government judge it incumbent on them, after the conclusion of this definitive treaty, to declare all alliances contracted with European nations in a state of hostility with Great Britain null and void, and hold themselves bound not to allow any European army to enter the Persian territory, nor to proceed towards India, nor to any of the parts of that country, and also engage not to allow any individuals of such European nations, entertaining a design of invading India, or being at enmity with great Britain, whatever, to enter Persia. Should any European powers wish to invade India by the road of Kharazm, Tartaristan, Bokhara, Samarkand, or other routes, His Persian Majesty engages to induce the kings and governors of those countries to oppose such invasion, as much as is in his power, either by the fears of his arms, or by conciliatory measures ..
- 3 The purpose of this treaty is strictly defensive, and the object is that from their mutual assistance both states should derive stability and strength; and this treaty has only been concluded for the purpose of repelling the aggression of enemies; and the purport of the word aggressions in this treaty is an attack upon the territories of another state. The limits of the territory of the two states of Russia and Persia shall be determined according to the admission of Great Britain, Persia, and Russia.
- 4 It having been agreed by an article in the preliminary treaty concluded between the high contracting parties, that in case of any European nation invading Persia, should the Persian Government require the assistance of the English, the Governor General of India, on the part of Great Britain, shall comply with the wish of the Persian Government, by sending from India the force required, with officers, ammunition, and warlike stores...

It is further agreed that the said subsidy shall not be paid in case the war with such European nation shall have been produced by an aggression on the part of Persia...

- 6 Should any European power be engaged in war with Persia when at peace with England, his Britannic Majesty engages to use his best endeavours to bring Persia and such European power to a friendly understanding. If, however, his Majesty's cordial interference should fail of success, England shall still, if required, in conformity with the stipulation in the preceding articles, send a force from India, or, in lieu thereof, pay an annual subsidy of two hundred thousand (200,000) Tomauns for the support of a Persian army, so long as a war in the supposed case shall continue, and until Persia shall make peace with such nation....
- 8 Should the Afghans be at war with the British nation, his Persian Majesty engages to send an army against them in such manner and of such force as may be concerted with the English Government. The expenses of such an army shall be defrayed by the British Government, in such manner as may be agreed upon at the period of its being required.
- 9 If war should be declared between the Afghans and Persians, the English Government shall not interfere with either party, unless their mediation to effect a peace shall be solicited by both parties.

### VI (b)

#### Annulment Of Articles III & IV Of 1814 Treaty

Relative to the Articles III and IV, of the propitious treaty between England and Persia, which was concluded by Mr. Ellis in the month of Zeekaud, A.H. 1229, agreeably to the engagements entered into with your Excellency, that, in consequence of the sum of 200,000 Tomauns, the currency of the country, presented as an aid to Persia, in conside-

ration of the losses she has sustained in the war with Russia, we, the heir apparent, vested with full powers in all matters connected with politics of this nation, have agreed that the said two articles shall be expunged, and have delivered a bond to your excellency, which is now in your hands.

## VII

**Letter From Mr. Secretary Macnaughten to Captain  
A. Burnes, on a Mission to Caubul Dated,  
Calcutta, September 11, 1837.**

- 1 I am directed by the Right Honourable the Governor General to acknowledge the receipt of your two letters, dated the 31st July last and the 1st ultimo, reporting your progress towards Cabool, and the circumstances attending it.
- 2 I am in the first place desired to convey to you His Lordship in Council's entire approbation of the judgment and zeal manifested by you in all your proceedings already reported.
- 4 The very important intelligence contained in your letter of the 1st ultimo has induced the Governor General in Council to alter in some measure the views under which your deputation to Cabool was originally designed.
- 5 That a Persian elchee has arrived (accompanied by a member of the Candahar family) is nearly certain. It appears probable...that you will have a difficult duty to perform under the circumstances by which Dost Mohammad will be surrounded. The quiet and unassuming character given at the outset to your mission will, owing to recent events be very much changed; and instead of your being merely the bearer of an invitation to the Ameer of general friendship and for a more free and cordial intercourse in matters of commerce, you may be looked for as an arbiter of



peace, and possibly as a supporter of extravagant pretensions.

- 6 It might have been well, perhaps, if under existing circumstances you had in the first instance visited Candahar and Herat rather than Cabool, but it might bear the character of instability of purpose if your course were now changed, even were it not too late to do so; and supposing you to have arrived at Cabool, it is evident that you cannot confine yourself in the existing state of excitement, to matters of a commercial nature.
- 7 It is not the intention of the Governor General in Council to invest you with any direct political power beyond that of transmitting any proposition which may appear to you to be reasonable through Captain Wade to your own Government.
- 8 You are authorised, however, whenever, an opportunity shall be afforded to you to communicate without reserve with Dost Mohammad upon his actual position, and to point out the light in which that position is considered by the Governor General in Council; our desire to see established the peace and security and independence of his dominions, and our regret to find him exposed to the hazards of war on one side, and excited to restlessness by interference and worthless promises on the other : that under any circumstances our first feeling must be that of regard for the honour and just wishes of our old and firm ally Ranjit Singh; that if however he looked for terms of peace adapted to a fair measure of his position, such good offices in his favour with the Maharajah as we can render would be given to him; but that if he received with favour every emissary and every proposition, the avowed object of which was to foment disturbances even at the hazard of his own independence, it is impossible but that the friendly feelings of the British Government must be impaired.

- 9 You will be careful, if you should come in contact with the Persian envoy, so to temper the personal civility and respect with which you will treat him, as to admit no claim of undue importance, and you will at once state to Dost Mohammad that we cannot recognise a right in the Shah of Persia to interfere in any way in his transactions with the Sikh or British Government; you will take care to show to him, in the strongest light, how utterly vain must be his hopes of assistance from the Persian Government, the resources of which are inadequate for the requirements of its own Government.
- 10 It is possible that these representations may have but little effect at the present moment, and it will be for you, upon a review of the influence which you are likely to gain upon passing events to decide upon the propriety of prolonging your stay in Cabool.
- 11 If your stay can be prolonged with propriety it is obvious that the information which you may be able to collect of the power, the means and the state of parties in that country cannot but be useful.
- 12 You will of course deem it your duty to discourage all extravagant pretensions on the part of Dost Mohammad. In the present state of his information, His Lordship in Council would be inclined to think that, if Peshawar were restored to any members of the Barukzays family on the condition of tribute to Ranjit Singh, the terms would be as favourable as any that could be expected; and if Dost Mohammad rejecting all attempts at drawing him into an alliance with Persia should consent to the restoration of permanent tranquility on this basis, and the tenor of your information from Captain Wade be such as to confirm you in this course...you are authorised to state that you will recommend to your Government the support of such an arrangement in the manner which shall be most conducive to the honour and interests of all parties, but you should apprise the Ameer that the cultivation

of all alliance with powers to the westward must cease as the indispensable condition of our friendly intervention....

- 14 As your ulterior proceedings must be altogether guided by the nature of your reception at Cabool, his Lordship in Council feels unable to furnish you with any specific instructions for your guidance beyond that point; but you have full authority to proceed to Candahar and Herat should you be of opinion that your presence in those countries would have the effect of counteracting Persian intrigues and of promoting the general tranquility of the countries bordering on the Indus.

### VIII

#### **Letter From Sir A. Burnes To William Macnaughten, Husn Abdal, June 2, 1838.**

Just as I was entering this place, I had the pleasure to receive your letter of the 23rd, requesting me to state my views on the means of counteraction which should be presented to Dost Mohammad Khan, in the policy that he is pursuing. I should have liked to have conversed with you on this important subject, for it has so many bearings, and involves so many conflicting interests, that it is impossible to do it justice; but I do not delay a moment in meeting your wishes, as far as can be done in a letter.

It is clear that the British Government cannot, with any credit or justice to itself, permit the present state of affairs at Caubul to continue. The counteraction applied must, however, extend beyond Dost Mohammed Khan, and to both Persia and Russia, A demand of explanation from the cabinet of St. Petersburg, would, I conceive, be met by an evasive answer, and gain for us no end; besides, the policy of Russia is now fairly developed, and requires no explanation, for it explains itself, since that Government is clearly resolved upon using the influence she possesses in Persia (which is as great there as what the British command in India) to extend her power eastward. It had better, therefore

be assumed at once that such are her plans, and remonstrate accordingly. If we can do but little with Russia, the cause is widely different with Persia. She should at once be warned off Afghanistan, and our continuance of an alliance with her should depend upon her compliance. I believe that a letter from the Governor General of India, sent to the Shah of Persia at Herat would gain our end, and this effected, there is nothing to fear from the proceedings of Dost Mohammed Khan, or any other of his Afghan chiefs. If this be left undone, they will succumb to Persia and Russia, and become the instruments for whatever those powers desire. I therefore distinctly state my conviction that the evil lies beyond Afghanistan itself, and must be dealt with accordingly.

If it is the object of Government to destroy the power of the present chief of Caubul, it may be effected by the agency of his brother, Sultan Mahomed Khan, or of Soojahool Moolk but to ensure complete success to the plan, the British Government must appear directly in it; that is, it must not be left to Sikhs themselves. Let us discuss the merits of these two plans; but first I must speak on the establishment of Sikh Power in Afghanistan, to which you refer as a general question.

No one entertains a more exalted opinion than I do of the Maharaja's head to plan and ability to achieve; but I look upon the power of the Sikhs beyond the Indus to be dependent on his life alone. It is mere temporising therefore to seek to follow up any such plan; and were this of itself not conclusive against it, the fact of its alienating the Afghan people, who are cordially disposed as a nation to join us, would be a sufficiently valid objection for not persevering in it. I conclude always that our object is to make the Afghans our own and to guide Afghanistan by Afghans, not by foreigners. It is, I assure you, a mere visionary delusion to hope for establishing Sikh ascendancy in Caubul. For arguments's sake, I will admit that the Maharaja may take it; but how is it to be retained? Why, he cannot keep his ground with credit in Peshawar, and the Sikhs themselves are averse to service beyond the Indus. But facts are more

illustrative than arguments; the French officers could not with safety leave homes to an evening dinner while we were at Peshawar, and our intercourse was confined to breakfasts. I saw this morning two tumbrils of money, the followers of dozens of other, on their way to Peshawar to pay the troops and the Maharaja only wishes a road of honour to retreat from it. If you use him, therefore, as an agent to go further ahead, the first request he will make of the British will be for money, and we shall waste our treasure without gaining our ends, which, as I understand, them, are in influence in Caubul, to exclude all intrigues from the West.

Of Sultan Mahomad Khan, the first instrument at command, you will remember that his brother, Dost Mahomed, plainly confessed his dread of him if guided by Sikh gold, and with such aid the ruler of Caubul may be readily destroyed; but Sultan Mahomad has not the ability to rule Caubul; he is a very good man but incapable of acting for himself; and, though fit as an instrument in getting rid of a present evil, he would still leave affairs as unsettled as ever when fixed in Caubul, and he is consequently a very questionable agent to be used at all.

As for Soojah-ool Moolk personally, the British Government have only to send him to Peshawar with an agent, and two of its own regiments as an honorary escort, and an avowal to the Afghans that we have taken up his cause, to insure his being fixed for ever on his throne. The present time is, perhaps, better than any previous to it, for the Afghans as a nation detest Persia, and Dost Mahomad having gone over the court of Teheran, though he believes it to be from dire necessity, converts many a doubting Afghan into a bitter enemy.

The Maharaja's premission has only, therefore, to be asked for the ex-king's advance on Peshawar, gracing him at the same time some four or five of the regiments which have no Sikhs in their ranks, and Soojah becomes King. He need not remove from Peshawar, but address the Khyburees Khoistanees of Caubul, and all the Afghans from that city, that he has the co-operation of the British and the Maharaja,



and with but a little distribution of ready money—say two or three lakhs of rupees he will find himself the real king of the Afghans in a couple of months. It is, however, to be remembered always that we must appear directly, for the Afghans are a superstitious people, and believe Soojah to have no fortune (Bukht); but our name will invest him with it. You will also have a good argument with the Maharajah in the honour of “Taj Bukhshie”, but still His Highness will be more disposed to use Sultan Mahomed Khan as an instrument than Soojah, for he will, perhaps, have exaggerated notions of Afghan power in prospect; but our security must be given to him, and we must identify ourselves with all the proceedings to make arrangements durable.

I have, thus pointed out to you how the chief of Caubul is to be destroyed and the best means which have occurred to me for effecting it; but I am necessarily ignorant of the Governor-General's views on what His Lordship considers the best mode of hereafter managing Afghanistan. It has been notified to me in various despatches, that this end may best be gained by using one small state to balance another to keep all at peace; and thus prevent any great Mohamadan power growing up beyond the Indus, which might cause future inconvenience. It is with every respect that I differ; but these are not my sentiments; and though in theory nothing may appear more just and beneficial, I doubt the possibility of putting the theory into practice, and more than doubt the practice producing the benefit expected from it; for a while you were trying to bring it about, another power steps in, paves the way for destroying the chiefships in detail, and the policy along with it. Our fears of a powerful Mohomadan neighbour are quickened by what we read of Ahmad Shah's war in India, and the alarms spread even by Zeman Shah, so late as the days of Lord Wellesely; but our knowledge of these countries has wondrously improved since that time; and though the noble Marquis, in his splendid administration, made the Afghans feel our weight through Persia, and arrested the evil, we should have had none of these present vexations if we had dealt with the

Afghans themselves. We then counteracted them through Persia. We then wish to do it through the Sikhs. But as things stand, I maintain it is the best of all policy to make Caubul in itself as strong as we can make it, and not weaken it by divided power; it has already been too long divided, Caubul owed its strength in bygone days to the tribute of Cashmere and Sindh. Both are irrecoverably gone; and while we do all we can to keep up the Sikhs as a power east of the Indus during the Maharaja's life, or afterwards, we should consolidate Afghan power west of the Indus, and have a king and not a collection of chiefs. *Divide et impera* is a temporising creed at any time, and if the Afghans are united, we and they bid defiance to Persia, and instead of distant relations, we have everything under our eye, and a steadily progressing influence all along the Indus.

I have before said, that we cannot with justice to our position in India allow things to continue as at present in Caubul; and I have already, in my despatch of the 30th April, suggested a prompt and active counteraction of Dost Mahomed Khan, since we cannot act with him. But it remains to be reconsidered why we cannot act with Dost Mohammed. He is a man of undoubted ability, and has at heart a high opinion of the British nation; and if half you must do for others were done for him, and offers made which he could see conduced to his interests, he would abandon Persia and Russia to-morrow. It may be said that that opportunity has been given to him; but I would rather discuss this in person with you, for I think there is much to be said for him. Government have admitted that at best he had but a choice of difficulties; and it should not be forgotten that we promised nothing, and Persia and Russia held out a great deal. I am not now viewing the question in the light of what is to be said to the rejection of our good offices as far as they went, or to his doing so in the face of a threat held out to him; but these facts show the man has something in him; and if Afghans are proverbially not to be trusted I see no reason for having greater mistrust of him than of others. My opinion of Asiatics is, that you can only rely

upon them when their interests are identified with line of procedure marked out to them; and this seems now to be a doctrine pretty general in all politics.

I shall say no more at present. It will give me great pleasure again to meet you....I ought to join you in ten days at the furthest.

## IX

### **A Note from Lord Clanricade to the Cabinet at St. Petersburg on Russian mission to Kabul and Kandahar (1837-1838).**

The undersigned is further instructed to state that the British Government possesses a copy of a Treaty which has been concluded between Persia and the Afghan ruler of Kandahar, the execution of which has been guaranteed by Count Simonich, which tends to afford Russia, if she adopts the guarantee, a pretence to compel the Shah of Persia not only to make himself master of Herat, but to deliver over that city afterwards to the rulers of Kandahar, to be held by them, together with their other possessions, in the capacity which those rulers engage by the Treaty to be acknowledged as tributaries to Persia.

The guarantee, therefore, contains a promise to compel Persia to defend the rulers of Kandahar against attack from any quarter whatever. It is true that in this stipulation no specific allusion is made to England, but the intention of the parties may be inferred from the original draft of of this treaty of which also Her Majesty's Government have a copy, and which was less cautiously worded, and in which specific mention was made to England as one of the rulers of Kandahar.

The undersigned is further instructed to state that a Russian agent of the name of Vicovitch, but sometimes calling himself Omer Beg, and said to be attached to the staff of the General commanding at Orendurg, was the bearer of letters from the Emperor and Count Simonich to the

ruler of Kabul, copies of which are in the possession of the British Government and that Count Simonich observed the most perfect silence towards the British minister at Tehran with respect to the mission of this agent; a reserve which might seem unnecessary if this agent was merely to deliver the letters of which he was the bearer, and if his mission was to have no tendency prejudicial to the British interest.

But the British Government have learned that Count Simonich announced to the Shah of Persia that this Russian agent would counsel the ruler of Kabul to seek assistance of the Persian Government to support him in his hostilities with ruler of the Punjab; and the further reports which the British Government have received of the language held by this Russian agent at Kandahar and at Kabul can lead to no other conclusion than that he exerted himself to detach the rulers of those Afghans states from all connexions with England and to induce them to place their reliance upon Persia in the first instance, and ultimately upon Russia.

If the British Government could entertain a doubt of the correctness of the foregoing information, that doubt would, in a great measure, be removed by the unfriendly language with respect to the British Government which Count Simonich held some time ago told to the agent of Kabul at the Court of Persia, and of which the British Government possess proof in the report made by that agent to the ruler of Kabul.

Lord Clanricade concludes by declaring that Russia is free to pursue with respect to the matters in question whatever course may appear to the Cabinet of St. Petersburg most conducive to the interest of Russia. But the British Government considers itself entitled to ask of the Cabinet of St. Petersburg whether the intention and the policy of Russia towards Persia and Great Britain are to be deduced from the declarations of Count Nesselrode and Mr. Rodofinikin to the Earl of Durham, or from the acts of Count Simonich and M. Vikovitch in Asia.

## X

**The Tripartite Treaty**

**Treaty of Alliance and Friendship Executed Between Maharaja Runjeet Singh and Shah Shooja-ool-Moolk, with the Approbation of, and in Concert with the British Government. June 26, 1838.**

Whereas a treaty was formerly concluded between Maharaja Ranjeet Singh and Shah Shooja-ool-Moolk, consisting of fourteen articles exclusive of the preamble and the conclusion; and whereas the execution of the provisions of the said treaty was suspended for certain reasons; and whereas at this time Mr. W. H. Macnaughten, having been deputed, by the Right Honourable George Lord Auckland...Governor General of India, to the presence of Maharaja Runjeet Singh, and vested with full powers to form a treaty in a manner consistent with the friendly engagement subsisting between the two states, the treaty aforesaid is revived, and concluded with certain modifications, and four new articles have been added thereto, with the approbation of and in concert with the British Government, the provisions whereof will be duly and faithfully observed:

1. Shah Shooja-ool Mulk disclaims all titles on the part of himself, his heirs, and successors, and all the Suddozyes to whatever territories lying on either bank of the River Indus, that may be possessed by the Maharaja ... These countries and places are considered to be the property, and to form the estate, of the Maharaja; the Shah neither has nor will have any concern with them. They belong to the Maharaja and his posterity from generation to generation....
13. Should the Maharaja require the aid of any of the Shah's troops in furtherance of the object contemplated by this treaty the Shah engages to send a force commanded by one of his principal officers; as far as Caubul, in furtherance of the object contemplated by this treaty.



14. The friends and enemies of each of the three high powers, that is to say, the British and Sikh Governments and Shah Shooja-ool-Moolk, shall be the friends and enemies of all.
16. Sikh troops may be despatched for the purpose of reinstating His Majesty in Caubul...
18. Shah Shooja-ool-Moolk binds himself, his heirs and successors, to refrain from entering into negotiations with any foreign state without the knowledge and consent of the British and Sikh Governments, and to oppose any power having the design to invade the British and Sikh territories by force of arms, to the utmost of his ability...

Done at Lahore, this 26th day of June, in the year of our Lord 1838...

Ratified by the Right Honourable the Governor General of India, Simla on the 23rd day of July, A.D. 1838.

## XI

### Simla Manifesto

**Declaration on the part of the Right Honourable  
The Governor General of India. Simla,  
October 1, 1838.**

The Right Honourable the Governor General of India having, with the concurrence of the Supreme Council, directed the assemblage of a British force for serving across the Indus, his Lordship deems it proper to publish the following exposition of the reasons which have led to this important measure:

It is a matter of notoriety that the treaties entered into by the British Government in the year 1832, with the Ameers of Sindh, the Nevab of Bhawalpor ; and Maharajah Runjit Singh, had for their object, by opening the navigation of the Indus, to facilitate the extension of commerce,

and to gain for the British nation in Central Asia that legitimate influence which an interchange of benefits would naturally produce.

With a view to invite the aid of the *de facto* rulers of Afghanistan in the measures necessary for giving full effect to those treaties, Sir Alexander Burnes was deputed, towards the close of the year 1836, on a mission to Dost Mohammed Khan, the chief of Caubul. The original objects of that Officer's mission were purely of a commercial nature. Whilst Sir Alexander Burnes, however, was on his journey to Caubul, information was received by the Governor General that the troops of Dost Mohammed Khan, had made a sudden and unprovoked attack on those of our ancient ally, Maharajah Ranjit Singh. It was naturally to be apprehended that His Highness the Maharajah would not be slow to avenge the aggression; and it was to be feared that, the flames of war being once kindled in the very regions into which we were endeavouring to extend our commerce, the peaceful and beneficial purposes of the British Government would be altogether frustrated. In order to avert a result so calamitous, the Governor General resolved on authorising Sir Alexander Burnes to intimate to Dost Mohammed Khan, that if he should evince a disposition to come to just and reasonable terms with the Maharajah, his Lordship would exert his good offices with His Highness for the restoration of an amicable understanding between the two powers. The Maharajah: with the characteristic confidence which he had uniformly placed in the faith and friendship of the British nation, at once assented to the proposition of the Governor General, to the effect that, in the meantime, hostilities on his part should be suspended.

It subsequently came to the knowledge of the Governor General that a Persian army was besieging Herat; that intrigues were actively prosecuted throughout Afghanistan, for the purpose of extending Persian influence and authority to the banks of, and even beyond, the Indus; and that the Court of Persia had not only commenced a course of injury

and insult to the officers of Her Majesty's Mission in the Persian territory, but had afforded evidence of being engaged in designs wholly at variance with the principles and objects of its alliance with Great Britain.

After much time spent by Sir A. Burnes in fruitless negotiations at Caubul, it appeared that Dost Mohammed Khan, chiefly in consequence of his reliance upon Persian encouragement and assistance, persisted, as respected his misunderstanding with the Sikhs, in urging the most unreasonable pretensions, such as the Governor General could not, consistently with justice and his regard for the friendship of Maharajah Ranjit Singh, be the channel of submitting to the consideration of His Highness; that he avowed schemes of aggrandizement and ambition injurious to the security and peace of the frontiers of India; and that he openly threatened, in furtherance of those schemes, to call in every foreign aid which he could command. Ultimately, he gave his undisguised support to the Persian designs in Afghanistan, of the unfriendly and injurious character of which, as concerned the British power in India, he was well apprized, and by his utter disregard of the views and interests of the British Government, compelled Sir A. Burnes to leave Caubul without having effected any of the objects of his mission.

It was now evident that no further interference could be exercised by the British Government to bring about a good understanding between the Sikh ruler and Dost Mohammed Khan, and the hostile policy of the latter chief showed too plainly that, so long as Caubul remained under his Government, we could never hope that tranquility of our neighbourhood would be secured, or that the interests of our Indian Empire would be preserved inviolate.

The Governor General deems it in this place necessary to revert to the siege of Herat and the conduct of the Persia nation. The siege of that city has now been carried on by the Persian army for many months. The attack upon it was a most unjustifiable and cruel aggression, perpetrated and

continued, notwithstanding the solemn and repeated remonstrances of the English envoy at the Court of Persia, and after every just and becoming offer of accommodation had been made and rejected. The besieged have behaved with a gallantry and fortitude worthy of the justice of their cause; and the Governor General would yet indulge the hope that their heroism may enable them to maintain a successful defence until succours shall reach them from British India. In the meantime, the ulterior designs of Persia, affecting the interests of the British Government have been, by a succession of events, more and more openly manifested. The Governor General has recently ascertained by an official despatch from Sir J. McNeill, Her Majesty's Envoy, that His Excellency has been compelled, by a refusal of his just demands, by and by a systematic course of disrespect adopted towards him by the Persian Government, to quit the Court of the Shah, and to make a public declaration of the cessation of all intercourse between the two governments. The necessity under which Great Britain is placed of regarding the present advance of the Persian arm into Afghanistan as an act of hostility towards herself, has also been officially communicated to the Shah, under the express of Her Majesty's Government.

The Chiefs of Candahar (brothers of Dost Mohammad Khan of Caubul) have avowed their adherence to the Persian policy, with the same full knowledge of its opposition to the rights and interests of the British nation in India, and have been openly assisting in the operations against Herat.

In the crisis of affairs consequent upon the retirement of our Envoy from Caubul, the Governor General felt the importance of taking immediate measures for arresting the rapid progress of foreign intrigue and aggression towards our own territories.

His attention was naturally drawn at this conjuncture to the position and claims of Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk, a monarch who, when in power, had cordially acceded to the measures of united resistance to external enemy, which were at

that time judged necessary by the British Government, and who, on his empire being usurped by its present rulers, had found an honourable asylum in the British dominions.

It had been clearly ascertained, from the information furnished by the various officers who have visited Afghanistan, that the Barakzai chiefs, from their disunion and unpopularity, are ill-fitted, under any circumstances, to be useful allies to the British Government and to aid us in our just and necessary measures of national defence. Yet so long as they refrained from proceedings injurious to our interests and security, the British Government acknowledged and respected their authority; but a different policy appeared to be now more than justified by the conduct of those chiefs, and to be indispensable to our own safety. The welfare of our possessions in the East requires that we should have on our western frontiers an ally who is interested in resisting aggression, and establishing tranquillity, in the place of chiefs ranging themselves in subservience to a hostile power, and seeking to promote schemes of conquest and aggrandizement.

After serious and mature deliberation, the Governor General was satisfied that a pressing necessity, as well as every consideration of policy and justice, warranted us in espousing the cause of Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk, whose popularity throughout Afghanistan had been proved to his Lordship by the strong and unanimous testimony of the best authorities. Having arrived at this determination, the Governor General was further of opinion that it was just and proper no less from the position of Maharajah Ranjit Singh than from his undeviating friendship towards the British Government, that His Highness should have the offer of becoming a party to the contemplated operations.

Sir William H. Macnaughten was accordingly deputed in June last to the Court of His Highness, and the result of his mission has been the conclusion of a tripartite treaty by the British Government, the Maharajah, and Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk, whereby His Highness is guaranteed in his present possessions, and has bound himself to cooperate for the



restoration of the Shah to the throne of his ancestors. The friends and enemies of any one of the contracting parties have been declared to be the friends and enemies of all.

Various points had been adjusted which had been the subjects of discussion between the British Government and His Highness the Maharajah, the identity of whose interests with those of the Honourable Company has now been made apparent to all the surrounding states. A guaranteed independence will, upon favourable conditions, be tendered to the Ameers of Sindh, and the integrity of Herat, in the possession of its present ruler, will be fully respected; while by the measures completed, or in progress, it may reasonably be hoped that the general freedom and security of commerce will be promoted; that the name and just influence of the British Government will gain their proper footing among the nations of the Central Asia; that tranquillity will be established upon the most important frontier of India; and that a lasting barrier will be raised against hostile intrigue and encroachment.

His Majesty, Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk will enter Afghanistan, surrounded by the own troops, and will be supported against foreign interference and factious opposition by a British Army.

The Governor General confidently hopes that the Shah will be speedily replaced on his throne by his own subjects and adherents; and when once he shall be secured in power, and the independence and integrity of Afghanistan established, the British army will be withdrawn. The Governor General has been led to these measures by the duty which is imposed upon him of providing for the security of the possessions of the British Crown; but, he rejoices that, in the discharge of his duty, he will be enabled to assist in restoring the union and prosperity of the Afghan people. Throughout the approaching operations, British influence will be sedulously employed to further every measure of general benefit, to reconcile differences, to secure oblivion of injuries, and to put an end to distractions by which, for so many years, the welfare and happiness of the Afghans

have been impaired. Even to the chiefs, whose hostile proceedings have given just cause of offence to the British Government, it will seek to secure liberal and honourable treatment, on their tendering early submission, and ceasing from opposition to that course of measures which may be judged the most suitable for the general advantage of their country,

By order of the right Honourable the Governor General of India.

W.H. Macnaughten  
Secretary to the Government of  
India with the Governor General

## XII (a)

Minute of Sir Jasper Nicolls  
November 10, 1840

The manner in which the affairs of Afghanistan have pressed upon the military resources of India are well known... upon Bengal they have borne so heavily, added to a prospect of war with Nepal, that the annual and most necessary relief of the native troops has been in a great degree suspended.... As long as an expectation of being able to withdraw a portion of our troops from Caubul this year was entertained, or could be reasonably hoped for, I abstained from offering any remarks on the subject of relief; but instead of withdrawing regiments from Afghanistan and Sindh, we are now sending into those countries between six and eight thousand men to confirm, in some place to re-establish, our supremacy. I used these words, because it is now clear to me that Shah Soojah, even with a force commanded by European officers, most inconveniently spared to instruct the troops, and to lead them on, will never be the independent King of Afghanistan. The semi-barbarous tribes of that country, who have been freed from any well-established rule for centuries, will not submit to any settled form of Government under a native of that land. They have shown

us that they do not stand in much awe even of our power and resources.

From the advanced position which we have taken up, we cannot, perhaps, consistently withdraw; in good faith we cannot displace Shah Soojah; we have, therefore, to continue to rule, as we now do, in his name, which entails the expense of his establishments, personal, civil and military, upon us, without any prospect of reimbursement. It is not, however, on financial grounds that I am anxious to lay my opinions before the Governor-General in Council—it is to recommend that the future may be considered, and that the Honourable Court may be solicited to authorise such addition to the Indian army as our present position seems to demand. Our occupation of Afghanistan draws a considerable portion of our troops entirely out of India, and the communication with them is always tedious...at times impracticable. We have at present five European regiments beyond the Indus, or proceeding thither, and I cannot, under existing circumstances, estimate our permanent European force at less than three regiments, two in the north and one in the Sindh ....

Recent events assure us that the Sikhs will not long quietly admit our establishment in Afghanistan, surrounded as they will be; humbled by the superiority which we claim when we require a passage for our troops and convoys through their territory; and elated by many years of successful encroachment on their neighbours, they will venture upon a trial of their strength.

Indian history proves that a sense of inferiority has not prevented adjoining states from forcing the British Government into hostilities:—Tippoo in 1799, Nepal, Ava, the Maharattas in 1817, afford instances of this. The Sikhs will follow their examples, I have no doubt, whenever they have, or think they have, a favourable opportunity.

We ought to be at all times strong enough to enter upon war simultaneously with these two states; and not entirely to forget that Ava still smarts under the loss of its territory. When compelled to enter into hostilities at the same time with the Sikhs and Napaulse, it may be so

arranged that we, at first, adopt a defensive line of proceeding towards one of them.

I have carefully avoided all reference to Herat, or to any employment of troops beyond the Hindoo-Koosh. If hostilities should be undertaken in either, the case I have attempted to establish will even more urgently require consideration and fore-thought.

J. NICOLLS

## XII (b)

### Minute of Sir Jasper Nicolls August 19, 1841

When the opinions of the members of Government were last given on the affairs of Afghanistan... The military base on which our positions in Afghanistan are now supported, is very objectionable on account of distance; difficulty of communication; foreign interposition. The seasons control and... the proceedings and policy of the Sikhs cannot be anticipated. To advance beyond the Helmund would greatly increase our difficulties. A corps at Herat could not be easily reinforced, and, as a bridle upon Persia, Russia and the Turcomans, it should contain, at least, the power of protracted self-defence. We should be called upon, probably at no distant time, to take the field in its support. To do this safely, we should be strong on our whole line from Caubul to Khelat, for Afghan intrigue would undoubtedly be actively employed to disturb the district from which the troops were drawn. Yar Mohammad is certainly a very insidious enemy, but if ejected from Herat he would not be less so. The Douranees and Ghilzyes are stimulated by him no doubt, and perhaps other tribes may be so; they do not, however, receive either money or aid from him, and they will tire of advice which only leads to their discomfiture.

Although Dost Mahomed is now residing amongst us, I do not perceive that the Shah's Government is much more at ease than it was at this time last year; though our military force beyond the Indus has been much increased. The hope

of leaving the Shah's dominions to his own force and government seems more distant than it then was.

J. NICOLLS

### XIII

**Copy of A Memorandum by The Duke of Wellington  
on Sir W. Macnaughten's Letter of October 26, 1841.  
January 29, 1842**

It is impossible to read the letter from Mr. Macnaughten to the Secretary to the Government of India, without being sensible of the precarious and dangerous position of our affairs in Central Asia.

Mr. Macnaughten complains of reports against the king Shah Soojah Khan and his Government, as libels...

It appears that when Macnaughten heard of the first symptoms and first acts of this rebellion, he prevailed upon the king to send a message to the rebels, inviting them to return to their allegiance...

But Mr. Macnaughten has discovered that the Company's troops are not sufficiently active personally, nor are they sufficiently well armed for the warfare in Afghanistan... Mr Macnaughten ought to have learnt by this time that hill countries are not conquered, and their inhabitants kept in subjection, solely by running up the hills and firing at long distances. The whole of a hill country of which it is necessary to keep possession, particularly for the communications of the army, should be occupied by sufficient bodies of troops well supplied, and able of maintaining themselves;...This is the mode of carrying on the war, and not by hiring Afghans with long matchlocks to protect and defend the communications of the British army.

But if the troops in the service of the East India Company are not able, armed and equipped as they are, to perform the service required of them in Central Asia, I protest against their being left in Afghanistan. It will not



do to raise, pay, and discipline matchlock-men, in order to protect the British troops and their communications, discovered by Mr. Macnaughten to be no longer able to protect themselves.

#### XIV

##### **A Proclamation made at Simla, October 1, 1842.**

The Government of India directed its army past the Indus in order to expel from Afghanistan a chief believed to be hostile to British interests and to replace upon his throne a sovereign represented to be friendly to those interests, and popular with his former subjects.

The chief believed to be hostile became a prisoner, and the sovereign represented to be popular was replaced upon his throne: but, after events which brought into question his fidelity to the government by which he was restored, he lost, by the hands of an assassin, the throne he had only held midst insurrection, and his death was preceded and followed by a still-existing anarchy.

Disasters unparalleled in their extent, unless by the errors in which they originated, and by the treachery in which they were completed, have in one short campaign been avenged upon every scene of past misfortunes; and repeated victories in the field, and the capture of the cities and citadels of Ghazni and Caubul, have again attached the opinion of invincibility to the British arms.

The British army in possession of Afghanistan will now be withdrawn to the Sutlej.

The Governor General will leave it to the Afghans themselves to create a government amidst the anarchy which is the consequence of their crimes.

To force a sovereign upon a reluctant people would be as inconsistent with the policy as it is with the principles of the British government, tending to place the arms and resources of that people at the disposal of the first invader, and to impose the burden of supporting a sovereign without prospects of benefit from his alliance.

The Governor-General will willingly recognise any government approved by the Afghans themselves, which shall appear desirous and capable of maintaining friendly relations with the neighbouring states.

Content with the limits nature appears to have assigned to its empire, the Government of India will devote all its efforts to the establishment and maintenance of general peace to the protection of the sovereigns and chiefs of its allies, and to the prosperity and happiness of its own faithful subjects.

The rivers of the Punjab and the Indus, and the mountainous passes, and the barbarous tribes of Afghanistan will be placed between the British army and an enemy approaching from the west...if, indeed, such an enemy there can be... and no longer between the army and its supplies.

The enormous expenditure required for the support of a large force in a false military position, at a distance from its own frontier and its resources, will no longer arrest every measure for the improvement of the country and of the people.

The combined army of India and of England, superior in equipment, in discipline, in valour, and in the officers by whom it is commanded, to any force which can be opposed to it in Asia, will stand in unassailable strength upon its own soil; and for ever, under the blessing of providence, preserve the glorious empire it has won in security and honour.

The Governor-General cannot fear the misconstruction of his motives in thus frankly announcing to surrounding states the pacific and conservative policy of his government.

Afghanistan and China have seen at once the forces at his disposal and the effect with which they can be applied.

Sincerely attached to peace for the sake of the benefits it confers upon the people, the Governor-General is resolved that peace shall be observed, and will put forth the whole power of the British government to coerce the state by which it shall be infringed.

By order of the Right Honourable the Governor General of India.

T. H. MADDOCK

Secretary to the Government of India,  
with the Governor General.

**XV (a)**

**Engagement of the Persian Government Regarding Herat,  
January 25, 1853.**

The Persian Government engages not to send troops on any account to the territory of Herat, excepting when troops from without attack that place, that is to say, troops from the direction of Cabool and Candahar, or from other foreign territory.

The Persian Government also engages to abstain from all interference whatsoever in the internal affairs of Herat, likewise in (regard to) occupation or taking possession or assuming the sovereignty or government, except that the same amount of interference which took place between the two in the time of the late, Zuheer-ood-Dowlah, Yar Mohammed Khan, is to exist as formerly...

The Persian Government also engages to relinquish all claim or pretension to the coinage of money and to the "Khootbeh", or to any other mark whatever of subjection or of allegiance on the part of the people of Herat to Persia...

...And if any foreign (state), either Afghan or other, should desire to interfere with or encroach upon the territory of Herat or its dependencies, and the Persian minister should make the request, the British Government are not to be remiss in restraining them and in giving their friendly advice, so that Herat may remain in its own state of independence.

**XV (b)**  
**Treaty of Peace Between Her Majesty the Queen of**  
**the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland**  
**and His Majesty the Shah of Persia**  
**March 4, 1857**

...Sincerely animated by a desire to put a stop to the evils of war, which is contrary to their friendly wishes and dispositions and to re-establish on a solid basis the relations of amity, which had so long existed between the two exalted states by means of a peace calculated for their mutual advantage and benefit,...

II Peace being happily concluded between their said Majesties, it is hereby agreed that the forces of Her Majesty the Queen shall evacuate the Persian territory, subject to conditions and stipulations hereafter specified.

V His Majesty the Shah of Persia engages further to take immediate measures for withdrawing from the territory and city of Herat, and from every other part of Afghanistan, the Persian troops and authorities now stationed therein; such withdrawal to be effected within three months from the date of the exchange of the ratifications of this treaty.

6 His Majesty the Shah of Persia agrees to relinquish all claims to sovereignty over the territory and city of Herat and the countries of Afghanistan, and never to demand from the Chiefs of Herat, or of the countries of Afghanistan, any marks of obedience, such as the coinage or 'Khootbeh', or tribute.

His Majesty further engages to abstain thereafter from all interference with the internal affairs of Afghanistan. His Majesty promises to recognise the independence of Herat and of the whole of Afghanistan, and never to attempt to interfere with the independence of those states.

In case of differences arising between the Government of Persia and the countries of Herat and Afghanistan, the Persian Government engages to refer them for adjustment to the friendly offices of the British Government and not to take up arms unless those friendly offices fail of effect.

The British Government, on their part, engage at all times to exert their influence with the States of Afghanistan to prevent any cause of umbrage being given by them, or by any of them, to the Persian Government; and the British Government, when appealed to by the Persian Government, in the event of difficulties arising, will use their best endeavours to compose such differences in a manner just and honourable to Persia.

XIV Immediately on the exchange of the ratifications of this Treaty, the British troops will desist from all acts of hostility against Persia, and the British Government engages further that, as soon as the stipulations in regard to the evacuation by the Persian troops of Herat and the Afghan territories, as well as in regard to the reception of the British Mission at Tehran, shall have been carried into full effect, the British troops shall, without delay, be withdrawn from all ports, places, and islands belonging to Persia;...

#### XVI (a)

**Treaty Concluded Between Sir John Lawrence, Chief  
Commissioner of The Punjab and Sirdar  
Gholam Hyder Khan at Peshawur,  
March 30, 1855**

Treaty between the British Government and His Highness Ameer Dost Mohammad Khan Walee of Cabool and of those countries of Afghanistan now in his possession; concluded on the part of the British Government by John Lawrence Esquire, Chief Commissioner of the Punjab, in virtue of full powers vested in him by the most noble James Andrew, Marquis of Dalhousie, K.T., & C., Governor General of India; and on the part of the Ameer of Cabool, Dost Mohammad Khan by Sirdar Ghulam Hyder Khan, in virtue of full authority granted to him by His Highness.

1. Between the Honourable East India Company and His Highness Ameer Dost Mohammad Khan, Walee of Cabool and of those countries of Afghanistan now in his possession, and the heirs of the said Ameer, there shall be perpetual peace and friendship.



2. The Honourable East India Company engages to respect those territories of Afghanistan now in His Highness's possession, and never to interfere therein.
3. His Highness Ameer Dost Mohammad Khan Walee of Cabool and of those countries of Afghanistan now in his possession, engages on his own part, and on the part of his heirs, to respect the territories of the Honourable East India Company, and never to interfere therein; and to be the friend of the friends and enemy of the enemies of the Honourable East India Company.

### **XVI (b)**

**Articles of Agreement between Ameer Dost Mohammad Khan on his own part and Sir John Lawrence and Lt. Col. H.B. Edwards on the part of the Honourable East India Company, made at Peshawur on January 26, 1857**

1. Whereas the Shah of Persia contrary to his engagement with the British Government, has taken possession of Herat, and has manifested an intention to interfere in the present possession of Ameer Dost Mohammad Khan, and there is now war between the British and Persian Governments, therefore the Honourable East India Company, to aid Ameer Dost Mohammad Khan to defend and maintain his present possessions in Balkh, Cabool and Candahar against Persia, hereby agrees out of friendship to give the said Ameer one lakh of Company's Rupees monthly during the war with Persia, on the following conditions,
2. The Ameer shall keep his present number of Cavalry and Artillery, and shall maintain not less than 18,000 Infantry, of which 13,000 shall be Regulars divided into 13 Regiments.
3. The Ameer is to make his own arrangements for receiving the money at the British treasuries and conveying it through his own country.
4. British Officers, with suitable native establishments and orderlies, shall be deputed, at the pleasure of the

British Government, to Cabool, or Candahar, or Balkh, or all three places, or wherever an Afghan army be assembled to act against the Persians. It will be their duty to see generally that the subsidy granted to the Ameer be devoted to the military purposes for which it is given, and keep their own Government informed of all affairs. They will have nothing to do with the payment of the troops, or advising the Cabool Government; and they will not interfere in any way in the internal administration of the country. The Ameer will be responsible for their safety and honourable treatment, while in his country, and for keeping them acquainted with all military and political matters connected with the war.

5. The Ameer of Cabool shall appoint and maintain a Vakeel at Peshawur.
6. The subsidy of one lakh per mensem shall cease from the date on which peace is made between the British and Persian Governments, or at any previous time at the will and pleasure of the Governor-General of India.
7. Whenever the subsidy shall cease the British Officers shall be withdrawn from the Ameer's country; but at the pleasure of British Government, a Vakeel, not a European Officer, shall remain at Cabool on the part of the British Government, and one at Peshawur on the part of the Government of Cabool.
8. The Ameer shall furnish a sufficient escort for the British officers from the British border when going to the Ameer's country, and to the British border when returning.
9. The subsidy shall commence from 1st January 1857, and be payable at the British treasury one month in arrears.
10. The five lakhs of Rupees which have been already sent to the Ameer (three to Candahar and two to Cabool), will not be counted in this Agreement. They are a free and separate gift from the Honourable East India Company. But the sixth lakh now in the hands of

the mahajuns of Cabool, which was sent for another purpose, will be one of the instalments under this Agreement.

11. This Agreement in no way supersedes the Treaty made at Peshawur on 30th March 1855 (corresponding with the 11th of Rujjub 1271), by which the Ameer of the Cabool engaged to be the friend of the friends and the enemy of the enemies of the Honourable East India Company; and the Ameer of Cabool, in the spirit of that Treaty, agrees to communicate to the British Government any overtures he may receive from Persia or the allies of Persia during the war, or while there is friendship between the Cabool and British Governments.
12. In consideration of friendship existing between the British Government and Ameer Dost Mohammad Khan, the British Government engages to overlook the past hostilities of all the tribes of Afghanistan, and on no account to visit them with punishment.

## XVII

### **Translation of Prince Gorchakov's Memorandum dated St. Petersburg, November 21, 1864**

The Russian newspapers have described the military operations, which have been carried out by a detachment of our troops in the regions of Central Asia with remarkable success and vast results. It was inevitable that these events should excite attention in foreign countries, and the more so because their theatre lies in regions which are hardly known.

Our august Master has directed me to explain succinctly, but with clearness and precision, our position in Central Asia, the interests which prompt our actions in that part of the world, and the aims which we pursue. The position of Russia in Central Asia is that of all civilised states which come into contact with half-savage, wandering tribes possessing no fixed social organisation.

It invariably happens in such cases that the interests of security on the frontier, and of commercial relations,

compel the more civilised state to exercise a certain ascendancy over neighbours whose turbulence and nomad instincts render them difficult to live with. First, we have incursions and pillage to repress. In order to stop these we are compelled to reduce the tribes on our frontier to a more or less complete submission. Once this result is attained they become less troublesome, but in their turn they are exposed to the aggression of more distant tribes. The state is obliged to defend them against these depredations, and chastise those who commit them. Hence the necessity of distant and costly expeditions, repeated at frequent intervals, against an enemy whose social organisation enables him to elude pursuit. If we content ourselves with chastising the freebooters and then retire, the lesson is soon forgotten. Retreat is ascribed to weakness, for Asiatics respect only visible and palpable force; that arising from the exercise of reason and a regard for the interests of civilisation has as yet no hold on them. The task has therefore to be performed over again.

In order to cut short these perpetual disorders we established strong places in the midst of a hostile population and thus we obtained an ascendancy which shortly but surely reduced them to a more or less willing submission. But beyond this line there are other tribes which soon provoked the same dangers, the same repression. The state then finds itself on the horns of a dilemma. It must abandon the incessant struggle and deliver its frontier over to disorder, which renders property, security and civilisation impossible; or it must plunge into the depths of savage countries, where the difficulties and sacrifices to which it is exposed increase with each step in advance. Such has been the lot of all countries placed in the same conditions. The United States in America, France in Algiers, Holland in her colonies, England in India,—all have been inevitably drawn into a course wherein ambition plays a smaller part than imperious necessity, and where the greatest difficulty is in knowing where to stop.

Such are the reasons which have induced the Imperial Government to establish itself, on the one side on the

Sir Darya, and on the other on the lake of Issik-kul, and to consolidate the two lines by advanced forts which little by little have penetrated the heart of these distant regions, but have not sufficed to secure tranquility on the frontier. The cause of this instability lies firstly in the existence between the extremities of this double line of a vast unoccupied tract where the incursions of robber tribes continue to neutralise our attempts at colonisation and our caravan traffic. It is in the second place due to perpetual changes in the political aspect of the countries to the south of our border. Turkistan and Khokand are sometimes united sometimes separated, but are always at war, either with each other or with Bukhara, and offer no probability of settled relations or regular transactions with them.

Thus in our own despite the Imperial Government finds itself reduced to the dilemma already stated: it must allow an anarchy to become chronic which paralyses all security and all progress, and involves distant and expensive expeditions at frequent intervals; or on the other hand it must enter on a career of conquest and annexation such as gave England her Indian Empire, in view of dominating in succession the petty independent states whose turbulent habits and perpetual revolts leave their neighbour neither truce nor repose. Neither of these alternatives is in consonance with the object of my august Master's policy, which aims at restricting the extent of the countries subject to his sceptre within reasonable limits, while it places his rule thereon on firm foundations, guarantees their security, and develops their social organisation, their commerce, well-being and civilisation.

Our task therefore has been to seek a system fitted to attain the triple object. In this view the following principles have been formulated :

- (i) It has been considered indispensable that the two fortified frontier lines, the one stretching from China to Lake Issik-kul, the other from the Sea of Aral along the lower course of the Sir Darya, should be linked together by a chain of strongholds, so that each fort should be in position to



afford mutual support and leave no space open to the incursions of nomad tribes.

- (ii) It was essential that the line of forts thus completed should be placed in a fertile country, not only in order to ensure supplies, but to facilitate regular colonisation which alone can give an occupied country a future or stability and prosperity, or attract neighbouring tribes to civilised life.
- (iii) It was a matter of urgency to fix this line in a definite manner in order to escape the danger of being drawn on from repression to reprisals which might end in a limitless expansion of our empire.

With this object it was necessary to lay the foundations of a system founded not merely on considerations of expediency but on geographical and political data which are fixed and permanent.

This system was disclosed to us by a very simple fact, the result of long experience, namely that nomad tribes which cannot be overtaken, punished or kept in hand are the worst neighbours possible ; while agricultural and commercial populations, wedded to the soil, and given a more highly developed social organisation, afford for us a basis for friendly relations which may become all that can be wished.

Our frontier line then should include the first, and stop at the boundaries of the second.

These three principles afford a clear, natural and logical, explanation of the recent military operations accomplished in Central Asia.

Moreover our old frontier stretching along the Sir Darya to Fort Perovski on one side and on the other as far as Lake Issik-kul, had the disadvantage of being almost at the edge of the desert. It was interrupted by an immense gap between the farthest points on the east and west. It offered very insufficient supplies to our troops, and left beyond it unsettled tribes with which we could not maintain stable relations.

In spite of our repugnance to give wider scope to our dominion these conditions were powerful enough to induce the Imperial Government to establish a frontier between Lake Issik-kul and the Sir Darya by fortifying the town of Chimkent recently occupied by us. In adopting this line we obtain a two-fold result. First the country which it includes is fertile, well-wooded and watered by numerous streams ; it is inhabited in part by Khirghiz tribes which have already acknowledged our supremacy, and therefore offers conditions favourable to colonisation and the supply of our garrison. Then it gives us the agricultural and commercial population of Khokand as our neighbours.

Thus we find ourselves confronted by a solid and compact social organisation—one less shifting and better arranged.

This consideration marks with geographical precision the limit where interest and reason command us to stop. On the one hand attempts to extend our rule will no longer encounter such unstable entities as nomad tribes, but more regularly organised states and will therefore be carried out at the cost of great effort, leading us from annexation to annexation into difficulties the end of which cannot be foreseen. On the other hand as we have as our neighbours states of that description, in spite of their low civilisation and nebulous political development, we hope that regular relations may one day in our common interest replace the chronic disorders which have hitherto hampered their progress.

Such are the principles which are the mainspring of our august Master's policy in Central Asia; such the final goal which His Imperial Majesty has prescribed as that of his Cabinet's action.

There is no necessity to insist on the palpable interest of Russia in restricting the growth of her territory and preventing the advent of complications in distant provinces which may retard and paralyse our domestic development.

The programme which I have just traced is in strict accord with this policy.

People of late years have been pleased to credit us with a mission to civilised neighbouring countries on the continent

of Asia. The progress of civilisation has no more efficacious ally than commercial relations. These require in all countries order and stability as conditions essential to their growth ; but in Asia their existence implies a revolution in the manners of the people. Asiatics must before all things be made to understand that it is more advantageous to favour and assure trade by caravans than to pillage them. These elementary principles can penetrate the public conscience only when there is a public; that is to say a social organisation and a government which directs and represents it. We are accomplishing the first portion of this task in extending our frontier to points where these indispensable conditions are to be met with. We accomplish the second when we undertake the duty of proving to neighbouring states by a policy of firmness as regards the repression of their misdeeds but of moderation and justice in the employment of armed strength and of respect for their independence that Russia is not their foe, that she cherishes no design of conquest, and that peaceful and commercial relations with her are more profitable than disorder, pillage, reprisals, and chronic warfare. In devoting herself to this task the Russian Cabinet has the interests of the Empire in view; but we believe that its accomplishment will also serve those of civilisation and humanity at large. We have a right to count upon an equitable and loyal appreciation of the policy which we follow, and the principles on which it is framed.

### XVIII

**Earl Granville To Lord A. Loftus, Foreign Office,  
January 24, 1873**

Her Majesty's Government have attentively considered the statements and arguments contained in Prince Gortchakoff's despatch of the 7/19 December, and the papers that accompanied it, which were communicated to me by the Russian Ambassador on the 17/29 December, and to Your Excellency by Prince Gortchakoff on the 29th of that month.

Her Majesty's Government gladly recognise, in the frank and friendly terms of that despatch, the same spirit of friendliness as that in which, by my despatch of the 17th of October, I desired to convey through your Excellency to the Russian Government the views of that of Her Majesty in regard to the line of boundary claimed by Shere Ali, the Ruler of Cabul, for his possessions of Afghanistan.

Her Majesty's Government see with much satisfaction that, as regards the principal part of that line, the Imperial Government is willing to acquiesce in the claim of Shere Ali, and they rely on the friendly feelings of the Emperor when they lay before him, as I now instruct your Excellency to do, a renewed statement of the grounds on which they consider that Shere Ali's claim to the remainder of the line of boundary, referred to in my despatch of the 17th October, to be well-founded.

The objections stated in Prince Gortchakoff's despatch apply to that part of Shere Ali's claims which would comprise the province of Badakshan with the dependent district of Wakhan within the Afghan State. The Imperial Government contend that province of Badakshan with its dependency, not having been formally incorporated into the territories of Shere Ali, is not legitimately any portion of the Afghan State.

To this Her Majesty's Government reply that the Ameer of Cabul having attained by conquest the sovereignty over Badakshan, and having received in the most formal manner the submission of the chiefs and people of that province, had the right to impose upon it such a form of Government as he might think best adapted to the position of affairs at the time. In the exercise of this right he appointed a local governor, and consented experimentally to receive a fixed portion of the revenues of the country, instead of having upon himself its general, financial and other administration. But the Ameer expressly reserved to himself the right of reconsidering this arrangement, which was, in the first instance, made only for one year, of at any time subjecting Badakshan to the direct Government

of Cabul, and of amalgamating the revenues thereof with the general revenue of the Afghan State. Her Majesty's Government cannot perceive anything in these circumstances calculated to weaken the claims of Shere Ali to the absolute sovereignty of Badakshan. The conquest and submission of the province were complete and it cannot reasonably be urged that any experimental form of administration which the Ameer, with the acknowledged right of sovereignty, might think fit to impose on Badakshan, could possibly disconnect the province from the general territories south of the Oxus, the sovereignty of which the Russian Government has without hesitation recognised to be vested in the Ameer of Cabul.

Her Majesty's Government have not failed to notice in portions of the statements of the Russian Government to which I am now replying, that its objection to admitting Badakshan and Wakhan to be under the sovereignty of Shere Ali is rested in part on an expressed apprehension lest their incorporation with the remainder of Afghanistan should tend to disturb the peace of Central Asia, and specifically should operate as an encouragement of the Ameer to extend his possessions at the expense of the neighbouring countries. I alluded in my despatch of the 17th of October, to the success which had attended the recommendations made to the Ameer by the Indian Government to adopt the policy which had produced the most beneficial results in the establishment of peace in countries where it had long been unknown; and Her Majesty's Government see no reason to suppose that similar results would not follow on the like recommendations. Her Majesty's Government will not fail to impress upon the Ameer in the strongest terms the advantages which are given to him in the recognition by Great Britain and Russia of the boundaries which he claims, and of obligation upon him to abstain from any aggression on the part, and Her Majesty's Government will continue to exercise their influence in the same direction.

Her Majesty's Government cannot, however, but feel that, if Badakshan and Wakhan, which they consider the Ameer justly to deem to be part of his territories, be assured by England or Russia, or by one or either of them, to



be wholly independent of his authority, the Ameer might be tempted to assert his claims by arms;... in that case Bokhara might seek an opportunity of acquiring districts too weak of themselves to resist the Afghan State; and that thus the peace of Central Asia would be disturbed, and occasion given for questions between Great Britain and Russia, which it is on every account so desirable to avoid, and which Her Majesty's Government feel sure would be as distasteful to the Imperial Government as to themselves.

Her Majesty's Government therefore feel that the Imperial Government, weighing these considerations dispassionately, will concur in the recognition which they have made of Shere Ali's rights, as stated in my despatch of October 1872, and by so doing put an end to the wild speculations, so calculated to distract the minds of Asiatic races, that there is some marked disagreement between England and Russia, on which they may build hopes of carrying out their border feuds for purposes of self-aggrandisement.

Her Majesty's Government congratulate themselves upon the prospect of definite settlement as between the two Governments of the question of the boundaries of Afghanistan the details of which have been so long in discussion.

Your Excellency will read and give a copy of this despatch to Prince Gortchakoff.

## XIX

### **Declaration of War (Second Afghan War), Proclamation of Viceroy addressed to Amir Shere Ali Khan, Camp Lahore, November 21, 1878**

The Viceroy of India to Amir Shere Ali Khan and to all the people of Afghanistan.

It is now ten years since the Amir Shere Ali Khan, after a prolong struggle, had at last succeeded in placing himself upon the throne of Kabul. At this time his dominion still needed consolidation, and the extent of it still undefined. In these circumstances the Amir, who had already been assisted by the British Government with

money and with arms, expressed a wish to meet the Viceroy. His wish was cordially complied with. He was courteously received and honourably entertained by the Viceroy at Umbala. The countenance and support he had come to seek were then assured to him. He at the same time obtained further unconditional assistance in arms and money. These tokens of the goodwill of the British Government, which he gratefully acknowledged, materially aided the Amir, after his return to his own country,... securing his position and extending his authority.

Since then the Amir Shere Ali Khan has received from the British Government, in confirmation of his goodwill, large additional gifts of arms. The powerful influence of the British Government has secured for him formal recognition by the Emperor of Russia of a fixed boundary between the Kingdom of Kabul and the Khanates of Bokhara and Kokand. The Amir's sovereignty over Wakhan and Badakshan were thereby admitted and made sure, a sovereignty which had, till then, been disputed by the Russian Government. His subjects were allowed to pass freely through the Indian Empire, to carry on trade and to enjoy all protection afforded by the British Government to its own subjects. In no single instance have they been unjustly or inhospitably treated within British jurisdiction.

For all these gracious acts the Amir Shere Ali Khan has rendered no return. On the contrary, he has required them with active ill-will and open discourtesy. The authority over Badakshan acquired for him by the influence of the British Government, was used by him to forbid passage through the province to a British officer of rank returning from a mission to a neighbouring state. He has closed free passage to British subjects and their commerce on the roads between India and Afghanistan. He has maltreated British subjects, and permitted traders to be plundered within his jurisdiction, giving them neither protection nor redress. He has put to death subjects of his own on the mere suspicion that they were in communication with the British Government. He has openly and assiduously

endeavoured, by words and deeds, to stir up religious hatred against the English, and incite war against the Empire of India. Having previously excluded British officers from every part of his dominions, and refuse to receive a British Mission, having left unanswered friendly communication addressed to him by the Viceroy, and repelled all efforts towards amicable intercourse between the British Government and himself, he has nevertheless, received formally and entertained publicly at Kabul an Embassy from Russia. This he has done at a time when such an act derived special significance from the character of contemporary events in Europe, and attitude of England and Russia thereto. Furthermore he has done it, well knowing that the Russian Government stands pledged, by engagements with England, to regard his territories as completely beyond the sphere of Russian influence. Finally while this Russian Embassy is still at his capital, he has forcibly repulsed at his outposts, an English envoy of high rank, of whose coming he had formal and timely announcement by a letter from the Viceroy attesting importance and urgency of the Envoy's mission.

Even then the British Government, still anxious to avert the calamities of war, deferred hostile action, and proffered to the Amir a lost opportunity of escaping the punishment merited by his acts. Of this opportunity the Amir has refused to avail himself....Animated by this wish, the British Government has made repeated efforts to establish with the Amir Shere Ali Khan those close and cordial relations which are necessary to the interests of the two neighbouring countries. But its efforts, after being persistently repulsed, have now been met with open indignity and defiance.

The Amir Shere Ali Khan, mistaking for weakness the long forbearance of the British Government has thus deliberately incurred its just resentment. With the sardars and people of Afghanistan this Government has still no quarrel, and desires none. They are absolved from all responsibility for the recent acts of the Amir; and as they have given no offence, so the British Government wishing

to respect their independence, will not willingly injure or interfere with them. Nor will the British Government tolerate interference on the part of any other power in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.

Upon the Amir Shere Ali Khan alone rests the responsibility of having exchanged the friendship for the hostility of the Empress of India.

### XX (a)

#### **Letter From Mr. Lepel Griffin to S. Abdur Rahman Khan June 14, 1880**

My friend, I have received your letter of 16th May by the hand of S. Ibrahim Khan, Sardar Bahadur, who arrived at Kabul on the 23rd May, and have fully understood its friendly sentiments, and the desire which it expresses for a cordial understanding between the British Government and yourself. This letter together with the memorandum of the Members of the mission, which was shown to you before dispatch, and which mentioned certain matters regarding which you desired further information, has been laid before His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor General of India; and I am now commanded to convey to you the replies of the Government of India to the questions which you have asked.

Firstly, With regard to the position of the Ruler of Kabul to foreign powers, since the British Government admit no right of interference by foreign powers in Afghanistan, and since both Russia and Persia are pledged to abstain from all political interference with Afghan affairs, it is plain that the Kabul ruler can have no political relations with any foreign power except the English; and if any such power should attempt to interfere in Afghanistan, and if such interference should lead to unprovoked aggression on the Kabul Ruler, then the British Government will be prepared to aid him, if necessary to repel it, provided that he follows the advice of the British Government in regard to his external relations.

Secondly. With regard to limits of territory, I am directed to say that the whole province of Kandhar has been plac-

ed under a separate ruler, except Pishin and Sibi, which are retained in British possession. Consequently the Government is not able to enter into any negotiations with you on these points, nor in respect to arrangements with regard to the North Western Frontier, which were concluded with the Ex-Amir Muhammad Yakub Khan. With these reservations the British Government are willing that you should establish over Afghanistan...including Herat, the possession of which cannot be guaranteed to you, though Government are not disposed to hinder measures which you may take to obtain possession of it...as complete and extensive authority as has been hitherto exercised by any Amir of your family. The British Government desires to exercise no interference in your internal government of these territories, nor will you be required to admit an English Resident anywhere; although for convenience of ordinary friendly intercourse between two contiguous states it may be advisable to station, by agreement, a Muhammadan agent of the British Government at Kabul.

If you should, after clearly understanding the wishes and intentions of the British Government, as stated in former letters and now further explained, desire these matters to be stated in a formal writing, it is necessary that you should first intimate plainly your acceptance or refusal of the invitation of the British Government and should state your proposals for carrying into effect friendly arrangements.

Sardar Wazirzada Muhammad Afzal Khan has been ordered to leave Khanabad within five days after receipt of this letter, as it is necessary to understand from him by word of mouth, the position of affairs and your wishes and sentiments. Should your reply be sent by his hand it will prevent delay and will accelerate the conclusion of final arrangements, and consequently the Government trusts that you will be able to make use of this agency.



## XX (b)

**Letter From S. Abdur Rahman Khan to  
Mr. Lepel Griffin  
June 22, 1880**

The kind letter, sent by the hand of Taj Muhammad Khan, telling me of your welfare and friendship, arrived on the 20th June, and caused me great pleasure. What was the wish and object of myself and people you yourself have kindly granted.

Regarding the boundaries of Afghanistan which were settled by treaty with my most noble and respected grandfather, Dost Muhammad these you have granted to me. And the Envoy which you have appointed in Afghanistan you have dispensed with, but what you have left to be settled according to my wish is, that I may keep a Muhammadan Ambassador, if I please. This was my desire and that of my people, and this you have kindly granted.

About my friendly relations and communications with foreign powers, you have written that I should not have any without advice and consultation with you (the British). You should consider well that if I have the friendship of a great Government like yours, how can I communicate with another Power without advice and consultations with you? I agree to this also.

You have also kindly written that should any unwarranted (improper) attack be made by any other Power on Afghanistan, you will under all circumstances afford me assistance; and you will not permit any other person to take possession of the territory of Afghanistan. This is also my desire, which you have kindly granted.

As to what you have written about Herat. Herat is at present in the possession of my cousin. So long as he does not oppose me and remains friendly with me, it is better that I should leave my cousin in Herat, rather than any other man. Should he oppose me, and not listen to my advice or those of my people, I will afterwards let you

know. Everything shall be done as we both deem it expedient and advisable.

All the kindness you have shown is for my welfare and that of my people, how should I not accept it? You have shown very great kindness to me and to my people.

I have written and sent letters containing full particulars to all the tribes of Afghanistan, and I have given copies of these papers to S. Muhammad Afzal Khan, for transmission to you, and I have communicated verbally to Afzal Khan certain matters.

Three days after this I will give him leave to start. Consider me also, the slave of the threshold of God, as having already arrived at Parwan.

Send me back a verbal reply by Muhammad Afzal Khan so that he may reach me on the road wherever I may be. Dated 13th Rajab.

### XX (c)

#### **Letter From Mr. Lepel Griffin To Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, 31 July 1880**

After compliments.

His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor-General in Council has learnt with pleasure that Your Highness has proceeded towards Kabul, in accordance with the invitation of the British Government. Therefore in consideration of the friendly sentiments by which Your Highness is animated, and of the advantage to be derived by the Sirdars and people from the establishment of a settled Government under Your Highness' sauthority, the British Government recognises Your Highness as Amir of Kabul.

I am further empowered on the part of the Viceroy and Governor-General of India, to inform Your Highness that the British Government has no desire to interfere in the internal Government of the territories in the possession of Your Highness, and has no wish that an English

Resident should be stationed anywhere within those territories. For the convenience of ordinary friendly intercourse, such as is maintained between two adjoining States, it may be advisable that a Muhammadan Agent of the British Government should reside, by agreement at Kabul.

Your Highness has requested that the views and intentions of the British Government with regard to the position of the ruler at Kabul in relation to Foreign Powers should be placed on record for Your Highness's information.

The Viceroy and Governor-General in Council authorises me to declare to you that since the British Government admits no right of interference by Foreign Powers within Afghanistan, it is plain that your Highness can have no political relations with any Foreign Power except with the British Government. If any Foreign Power should attempt to interfere in Afghanistan, and if such interference should lead to unprovoked aggression on the dominions of Your Highness, in that event the British Government would be prepared to aid you, to such extent and in such manner as may appear to the British Government necessary in repelling it; provided that your Highness follows unreservedly the advice of the British Government in regard to your external relations.

## XXI

### The Protocol of 1885 (Translation)

The undersigned, the Marquis of Salisbury, Her Britannic Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs,... and His Excellency M. George de Staal, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of His Majesty the Emperor of All the Russians at the Court of Her Britannic Majesty..., have met together for the purpose of recording in the present Protocol the following agreement which has been arrived at between Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and His Majesty the Emperor of All the Russias :

1. It is agreed that the frontier of Afghanistan, between the Heri-Rud and the Oxus, shall be drawn as follows :

The Frontier will start from the Heri-Rud about 2 versts below the fort of Zulfikar, and will follow the line marked in red on the Map No. 1, attached to the Protocol as far as the point K in such a manner as not to approach nearer than a distance of 3,000 English feet to the edge of the scarp of the western defile (including the crest marked L.M.N. of the northern branch of that defile). From the point of K the line will follow the crest of the heights bordering on the north the second defile, which it will cut a little to the west of the bifurcation at a distance of about 850 sajens from the point where the roads from Adam-Ulan, Kungrueli, and Ak-Robat meet. The line will then continue to follow the crest of the heights—as far as the point P marked on Map No. 2 attached to the Protocol. From thence it will run in a southeasterly direction nearly parallel to the Ak-Robat road, will pass between the salt lakes marked Q and R, which are to the south of Ak-Robat and to the north of Souma Karez, and leaving Souma Karez to the Afghans. will run to Islion, where the frontier will cross to the right bank of the Egri-Gueuk, leaving Islim, outside Afghan territory. The line will then follow the crests of the Hills which border the right bank of the Egri-Gueuk, and will leave Chemen-i-Bid outside the Afghan frontier. It will in like manner follow the crest of the hills which border the right bank of the Kushk as far as Hauzi Khan. From Hauzi Khan the frontier will follow an almost straight line to a point on the Murghab to the north of Maruchak, fixed so as to leave to Russia the lands cultivated by the Sarika, and their pastures.

Applying the same principle both to the Turkomans subject to Russia and to the subjects of the Ameer of Afghanistan, the frontier will follow east of the Murghab a line north of the valley of the Kaisor, and west of the valley of the Sangalak (Ab-i-Andkhoi), and leaving Andkhoi to the east will run to Khoja Saleh on the Oxus.

The delimitation of the pastures belonging to the respective populations will be left to the Commissioners.

In the event of their not arriving at an understanding, this delimitation will be settled by the two cabinets on the basis of the maps drawn up and signed by the Commissioners.

For the sake of greater clearness the principal points of the frontier line are marked on the maps annexed to the present Protocol.

2. It is agreed that Commissioners shall forthwith be appointed by the Government of Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and His Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias, who shall proceed to examine and trace upon the spot the details of the Afghan frontier as fixed by the preceding article. One Commissioner shall be appointed by Her Majesty the Queen and one by His Majesty the Emperor. The escorts of the Commission are fixed at 100 men at most on either side, and no increase shall be made without an agreement between the Commissioners. The Commissioners shall meet at Zulfikar within two months from the date of the signature of the present protocol, and shall at once proceed to trace the frontier in conformity with the preceding stipulations.

It is agreed that the delimitation shall begin at Zulfikar and that, as soon as the Commissioners shall have met and commenced their labours, the neutralization of Penjdeh shall be limited to the district comprised between a line to the north running from Bend-i-Nadir to Burdj-Uraz Khan and a line to the south running from Maruchak to Hauzi Khan, the Russian and Afghan posts on the Murghab being respectively at Bend-i-Nadir and Maruchak. The commissioners shall conclude their labours as quickly as possible.

3 It is agreed that in tracing this frontier, and in conforming as closely as possible to the description of this line in the present protocol, as well as to the points marked on the maps annexed thereto, the said commissioners shall pay due attention to the localities, and to the necessities and well-being of the local populations.

4 As the work of delimitation proceeds, the respective parties shall be at liberty to establish posts on the frontier.



5 It is agreed that, when the said commissioners shall have completed their labours, maps shall be prepared and signed, and communicated by them to their respective Governments.

Done at London, the 10th September, 1885.

## XXII

**Agreement between Amir Abdur Rahman Khan Amir  
of Afghanistan and Sir Henry Mortimer Durand  
Foreign Secretary to the Government of India  
(Concerning Russo-Afghan Boundary)**

**November 12, 1893**

Whereas the British Government has represented to His Highness the Amir that the Russian Government presses for the literal fulfilment of the Agreement of 1873 between Russia and England by which it was decided that the river Oxus should form the northern boundary of Afghanistan, from Lake Victoria (Wood's Lake) or Sarikol on the east to the junction of the Kokcha with the Oxus, and whereas the British Government considers itself bound to abide by the terms of this Agreement, if the Russian Government equally abides by them, His Highness Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, ... Amir of Afghanistan and its Dependencies, wishing to show his friendship to the British Government and his readiness to accept their advice in matters affecting his relations with foreign powers, hereby agrees that he will evacuate all the districts held by him to the north of this portion of the Oxus on the clear understanding that all the districts lying to the south of this portion of the Oxus, and not now in his possession, be handed over to him in exchange. And Sir Henry Mortimer Durand... Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, hereby declares on the part of the British Government that the transfer to his Highness the Amir of the said districts lying to the south of the Oxus is an essential part of this transaction and undertakes that arrangements will be made with the Russian Government to carry out the transfer of the said lands to the north and south of the Oxus,

## XXIII

Agreement between the Governments of Great Britain and Russia with regard to the spheres of influence of the two countries in the region of the Pamirs

The Earl of Kimberley to M. de Staal,  
March 11, 1895

As a result of the negotiations which have taken place between our two Governments in regard to the spheres of influence of Great Britain and Russia in the country to the east of Lake Victoria (*Zor Koul*), the following points have been agreed upon between us:

1. The spheres of influence of Great Britain and Russia to the east of Lake Victoria (*Zor Koul*) shall be divided by a line which, starting from a point on that lake near to its eastern extremity, shall follow the crests of the mountain range running somewhat to the south of the latitude of the lake as far as the *Bendersky* and *Orta-Bel* Passes.

From thence the line shall run along the same range while it remains to the south of the latitude of the said lake. On reaching that latitude it shall descend a spur of the range towards *Kizil Rabat* on the *Aksu River*, if that locality is found not to be north of the latitude of Lake Victoria, and from thence it shall be prolonged in an easterly direction so as to meet the Chinese frontier.

If it should be found that *Kizil Rabat* is situated to the north of the latitude of *Lake Victoria*, the line of demarcation shall be drawn to the nearest convenient point on the *Aksu River* south of that latitude, and from thence prolonged as aforesaid.

2. The line shall be marked out, and its precise configuration shall be settled by a Joint Commission of a purely technical character, with a military escort not exceeding that which is strictly necessary for its proper protection.

The Commission shall be composed of British and Russian delegates, with the necessary technical assistance.

Her Britannic Majesty's Government will arrange with the Ameer of Afghanistan as to the manner in which His Highness shall be represented on the Commission.

3. The Commission shall also be charged to report any facts which can be ascertained on the spot bearing on the situation of the Chinese frontier, with a view to enable the two Governments as to the limits of Chinese Governments as to the limits of Chinese territory in the vicinity of the line, in such manner as may be found most convenient.
4. Her Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of His Majesty the Emperor of Russia engage to abstain from exercising any political influence or control, the former to the north, the latter to the south, of the above line of demarcation.
5. Her Britannic Majesty's Government engage that the territory lying within the British sphere of influence between the Hindu Kush and the line running from the east end of Lake Victoria to the Chinese frontier shall form part of the territory of the Amir of Afghanistan, that it shall not be annexed to Great Britain, and that no military post or forts shall be established in it.

The execution of this agreement is contingent upon the evacuation by the Ameer of Afghanistan of all the territories now occupied by His Highness on the right bank of the *Panjah* and on the evacuation by the Ameer of Bokhara of the portion of *Darwaz* which lies to the south of the Oxus, in regard to which Her Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of His Majesty the Emperor of Russia have agreed to use their influence respectively with the two Ameers.

I shall be obliged if, in acknowledging the receipt of this note, your Excellency will record officially the Agreement which we have thus concluded in the name of our respective Governments,

## XXIV

**Anglo-Afghan treaty March 21, 1905 (Treaty with Amir Habibulla Khan continuing the Agreements which had existed between the British Government and Amir Abdur Rahman Khan**

**He is God. Extolled be His Perfection.**

His Majesty Siraj-ul-millat-wa-din Amir Habibulla Khan, Independent King of the State of Afghanistan and its dependencies, on the one part, and the Honourable Mr. Louis William Dane, C. S. I. Foreign Secretary of the Mighty Government of India and Representative of the Exalted British Government on the other part.

His said Majesty does hereby agree to this that, in the principles and in the matters of subsidiary importance of the treaty regarding internal and external affairs and of the engagements which His Highness, my late father, that is, Zia-ul-millat-wa-ud-din, who has found mercy, may God enlighten his tomb, concluded and acted upon with the Exalted British Government, I also have acted, am acting and will act upon the same agreement and compact, and I will not contravene them in any dealing or in any promise.

The said Honourable Mr. Louis William Dane does hereby agree to this that as to the very agreement and engagement which the Exalted British Government concluded and acted upon with the noble father of his Majesty Siraj-ul-millat-wa-ud-din that is His Highness Zia-ul-millat-wa-ud-din, who has found mercy, regarding the internal and external affairs and matters of principle or of subsidiary importance, I confirm them and write that they (the British Government) will not act contrary to those agreements and engagements in any way or at any time.

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